THE MAN WHO AMAZED FISH — by FRANK OWEN

MAY

Weird Tales

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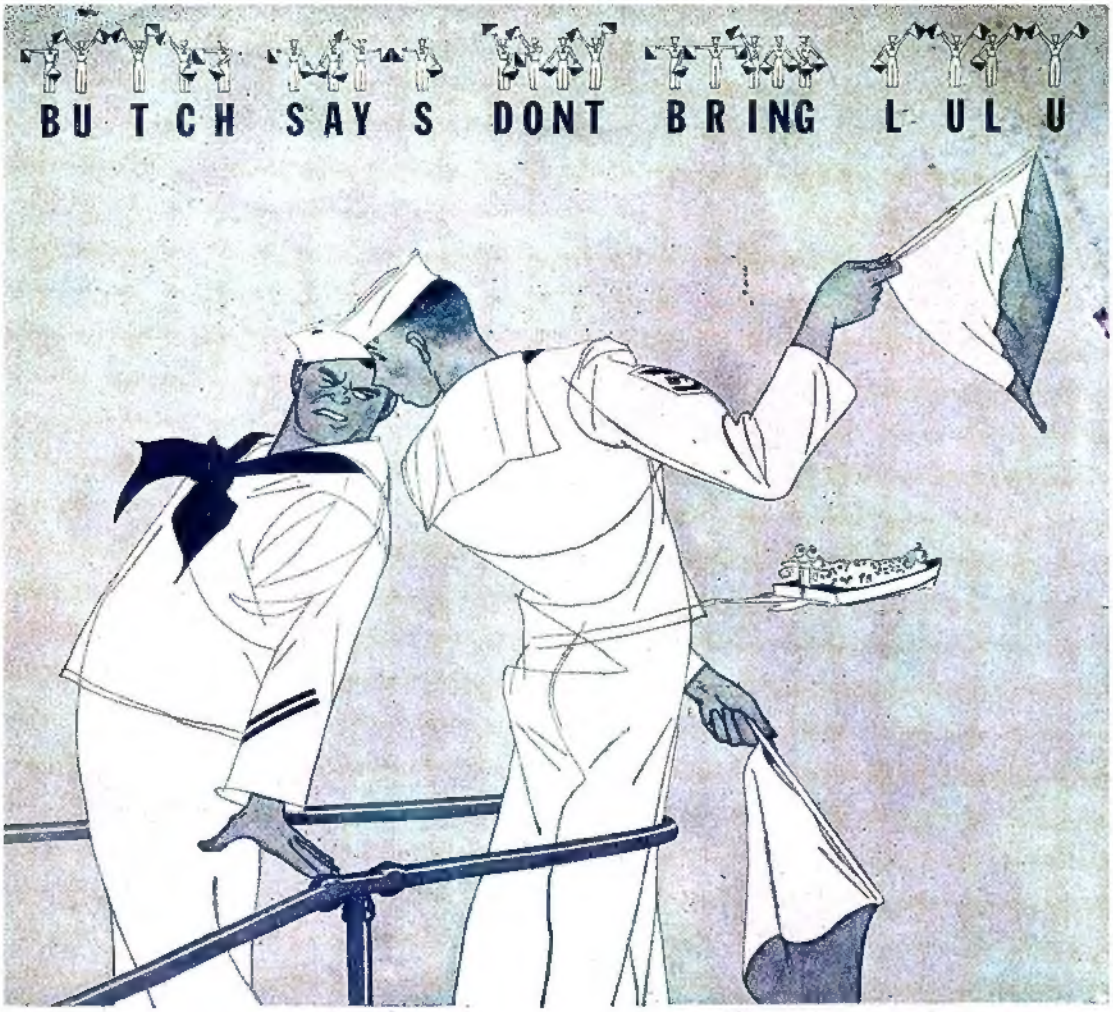
Through all the ages Cawder men will always return to — Cawder's wife

JOHN CAWDER'S WIFE

A novelette by

P. Schuyler Miller



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Weird Tales

ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

MAY, 1943 Cover by Margaret Brundage

NOVELETTE

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Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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D. McILWRAITH, *Editor.* LAMONT BUCHANAN, *Associate Editor.*

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"The 7 Keys to Power alleges to teach," the author says, "All the Mysteries of Life from the Cradle to the Grave—and Beyond. It tells you the particular day and hour to do anything you desire, whether it be in the light of the moon, sun, or in total darkness."

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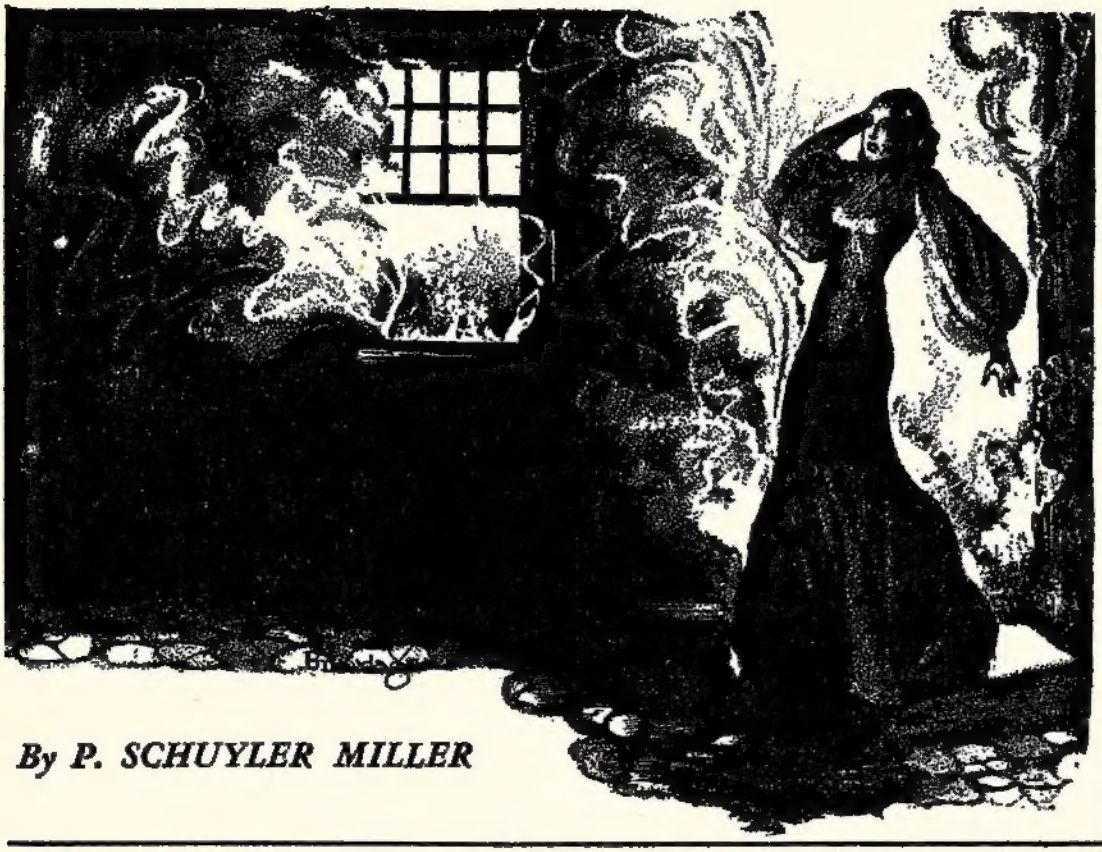
John Cawder's Wife

There were many kinds of rumors. But all anybody knew was that something dread and unspeakable was hidden away out there in the mists and wilderness.

FROM where he sat, sheltered from the wind by the rock at his back, Thorne looked down on a restless sea of cloud out of which the higher peaks pushed occasional wooded shoulders. It was early: he had slept on the mountain, and climbed to this lookout before dawn. When the clouds lifted the wilderness would lie spread out at his feet like a map. Into that wilderness John Cawder had disappeared.

Roger Thorne and John Cawder had been roommates in prep school and for two years of college, before the older boy had suddenly pulled up roots and vanished on the eve of his twenty-first birthday. Their tastes had been much alike and very different from those of their classmates, and it was loneliness as much as anything that drew them together in the beginning and held them for those five years.

Cawder was queer—much more so than



By P. SCHUYLER MILLER

his friend, whose greatest sin against society was the earnestness with which he applied himself to the most unrewarding work. The queerness grew, until only Thorne would have much to do with him. He came of a talented line: his father a poet whose early promise had flowered macabrely and withered overnight—his grandfather a chemist and physician of note who choose to bury himself in the dark corners of the world, doing battle with little-known diseases. His own talent lay in his paintings, and even as a boy they had attracted attention. At first they had been sunny—clean—full of the feverish vitality which was so characteristic of him, but as he grew older they changed as he did. In that later phase, as he blazed a meteoric trail through the salons of prewar Europe, something dark and morbid crept into them and touched them with the kind of strangeness which makes people shift uneasily and look away, only to look again—and buy.

Thorne had not seen him in all those years. He had had his own successes in mathematics—the borderline of theoretical physics—but it was in no way spectacular as Cawder's was. The artist's lean face was in all the picture magazines, lending its distinguished pallor alike to the Old Families and café society, while Thorne was known to the handful of men, leaders in their own fields, whom his work touched. Both men were lonely: Cawder's the loneliness of his genius, untouched by the bland, blind adulation of his public—Thorne's a loneness which he had chosen himself, because there were few people who could join him in the world in which his thoughts moved, and because there was another world—this world of mountains and empty skies—

where being alone made him a part of the things he loved most.

THREE days ago they had met on the platform of a little mountain station where Thorne sat, hands clasped over the patched knee of his breeches, puffing on a stubby pipe and swapping yarns with old Jim Dawson, the station master. They had been face to face as Cawder stepped off the late train. They eyes met, and Thorne knew that the artist recognized him, but Cawder turned quickly away, climbed into a streamlined roadster parked behind the station, and drove off into the darkness.

Thorne had probed a little then. He learned of the fenced-in wilderness with its armed guards and its great iron gates, always locked. He heard of game which was never shot, fish which were never caught, mile after mile of timber which no axe had ever touched—woodsmen's stories, told by men he knew well. He heard rumors, too, and because they in no way fitted the John Cawder he had once known, he was here, inside the fence, past the ring of guards, waiting on a mountain top for the sun to raise the mists.

The wind through the junipers beneath him played a muted melody which he tried dreamily to break up into its component notes, visualizing the mathematical functions which would express them. The bird songs of early morning came up to him out of the edge of shadow where the bulk of the mountain loomed over the valley. A junco flicked to a spruce bough, tinkled briefly and was answered; a strayed butterfly moved like a speck of sunlight against the forest far below. But before his half-closed eyes was the lined, pale phantom of John Cawder's face as he had seen it for that moment under the yellow light of the station lantern: desperately lonely, desperately unhappy.

He picked up the binoculars that lay on the moss beside him. The leaden glimmer of a lake showed through a gap in the clouds, almost directly under him. Fingers of the mist stretched across it, frayed by the wind, spinning away into invisibility. He found the scar that spread its ugly fan across the mountainside above the lake, where fire had eaten through thousands of acres of virgin forest nearly two generations ago. It had been in Cawder's time—John's father—while Old Cawder, his grandfather, was still alive. Jim Dawson had told him the story: with the other men from the settlement he had fought the fire and been driven off by the Cawder men for his pains. The fence had been built after that—guards brought in from outside—a hard road made. From that day, even in starvation times, no mountain man had set foot on Cawder land and no Cawder had entered the crossroads store. Now Young Cawder—John Cawder—lived there behind his walls as his tribe had before him, an outlander, hated and despised.

EVEN after forty years the burnt-over area was an evil-looking thing. Thorne's powerful glasses picked out the charred skeletons of once giant trees, veiled a little by the struggling undergrowth. He saw the bare bones of the mountain jutting out where the fan of desolation spread itself against the peak, and followed its ragged edges down to the point which was the handle of the fan—to the lake and the house.

It was set on solid rock—a granite block, split off the mountain centuries ago and bedded deeply in the valley floor. It was built of rock, four-square, gray and ugly. Cawder—John's father—had built it to replace the house the fire had destroyed. He had not made it beautiful, poet though he was.

The lake was at its foot, the forest behind it. A terrace of fitted stone mosaic, marked in some complicated pattern, surrounded it. From the edge of the terrace

a neglected lawn straggled down to the forest's rim. It looked empty—deserted—and lonely as Cawder had been.

She had been standing in one of the recessed balconies overlooking the lake. Thorne did not see her until she moved. She came out of the shadows and stood with her hands braced against the parapet, the pale oval of her face turned up to the mountain, her tall body a scarlet sliver against the gray stone. It seemed that he could feel her eyes on him, studying him, and an unaccountable shiver wriggled up his spine. Then as suddenly as she had appeared she was gone.

"Cawder's wife!" Old Jim had spat deliberately at the stove and closed his thin mouth tight. Thorne wondered if this were she.

It was past noon before he reached the lake shore. The woods were paper dry, the distant ranges shrouded in haze. The house rose above him like a weathered skull, its windows like sunken, glassy eyes watching him, its two wings like high, bare cheekbones, its great front door a black nasal pit. It swam in the shimmering heat of the afternoon, but took no warmth from it.

His boots clacked hollowly on the close-laid mosaic of the terrace. It was old—far older than the house. There was something oddly familiar about the interlacing pattern picked out in dull black stones against the white, weaving a tangled band about the house. It was like the complicated pattern on Celtic crosses and Norse swords—like, he remembered, a Roman pavement he had seen buried in the West Country of England—a little temple, set in its grove of ancient oaks, half swallowed up by the thick green carpet of grass.

He followed the mosaic, widdershins around the house, stepping with absurd care in the white spaces in the complex design. He remembered as a child playing the same nonsense game on the battered flagstones at home. "If you step upon a crack, you will break your mother's back!" It had been very serious to him then, and it seemed, oddly, to be just as vital now. He grunted in disgust at his own childishness, and looked up.

She stood in the window, just above him. Her hair and her eyes were black, and her skin dark. Her hand, holding the heavy curtain away from the window, was slim but strong. She had no beauty, but there was something about her that held him, staring. Then the curtain fell across the window and the spell broke.

He turned toward the cavernous entry. Across the neglected lawn, at the edge of the forest, the sun glinted on polished metal. As he turned toward it hot steel landed through his arm and a rifle cracked spitefully. Thorne flung himself flat on the pavement as a second bullet ripped over his head. He heard the creak of hinges as the door opened behind him, and Cawder's voice, not much changed for all the years since he had heard it:

"Kreb! I'll handle this!"

HE SAT up. Blood was soaking his coat sleeve and dripping from his wrist. He flexed the muscles gingerly. It was a flesh wound, but it hurt. Kreb hadn't meant to miss.

There was a queer light in Cawder's eyes. Anger—relief—and something more. In the sunlight the man looked even older than by night. His hair was streaked with gray, his cheeks sunken, his strong frame stooped. Only his deep voice had not changed.

"I thought you'd come," he said. "The men were watching for you. I had forgotten what a woodsman you are. Well, since you're here—welcome to Cawder Hall."

Thorne got slowly to his feet. It was a hell of a queer reception, to shoot a man down in cold blood, inform him he isn't wanted, then invite him in to tea. But

John Cawder was queer, and no one knew it better than he, who had been his friend for five full years.

"Thanks," he replied curtly. "It's kind of you."

The door was old carved oak with hinges of hand-wrought iron—the kind of thing Hearst collected for his warehouses—but in this setting it belonged. Inside, the house was considerably more livable than its exterior indicated. Somebody had gone to some pains to see to that. Cawder ushered him into a big, paneled room lined with bookshelves, with a huge fireplace and plenty of comfortable furniture. A slim blonde girl rose from a desk in the corner, slipping off rimless spectacles.

"Grace, this is Roger Thorne—he went to school with me." Cawder's voice was expressionless. "He dropped in for a visit and Kreb winged him. Fix him up, will you?" He turned and left the room.

Thorne studied the top of her bent head as she went to work on his arm. She was too old to be Cawder's daughter. Was she his wife, then—and if so, who was the dark woman of the window?

She went at the job with a neat precision which seemed characteristic. Kreb's slug had ripped a bloody but shallow gash in the flesh of his left arm. She got hot water and bandages, cleaned it and wrapped it up, and made him a sling from a bright-colored square of silk which she had evidently worn over her ash-blonde hair; all without saying more than half a dozen words. She finished by neatly sewing up the gash she had cut in his shirt sleeve, nipping off the thread with small white teeth. She stepped back and looked up at him, and he saw that her eyes behind the glasses were soft, warm brown.

"Will you be staying, Mr. Thorne?" she asked. "I think John—Mr. Cawder—expects you to. This," she touched his arm, "was an unfortunate mistake. Kreb has very little imagination."

There was that same queer note in her voice that he had heard in Cawder's. They wanted him here—and yet they didn't. They posted guards to shoot down trespassers without warning. They put up a nine-foot charged fence around their woods and mountains to keep outsiders at a distance. They wanted none of any stranger—and yet his coming was somehow important to them both—somehow vital to their hopes and fears.

His eyes dropped to her hand: there was no ring. She caught his glance and flushed. "I'm Grace Walton," she said. "Mr. Cawder's secretary."

THORNE took her statement for what it was worth. "Thank you," he said stiffly. "You've been very kind. But under the circumstances I doubt that I would be comfortable here. I have a certain prejudice against accepting the hospitality of any man who has just had me shot."

She caught at his sleeve. "Oh—please! It isn't—what you think. It isn't John! There's a reason why no one should come to this house—ever—but now you're here—now it may be different. It may be—the answer."

Thorne had not heard Cawder's step behind him. The man spoke. "I think it is, Grace. I'm going to find out." He touched Thorne's shoulder, turning him toward the door. "Roger—my wife."

She was the woman of the window. She still wore the clinging scarlet gown that set off her inky hair and dusky skin so startlingly. Her hair was drawn like a shining cap over her ears, framing her face, and a double chain of jet was clasped about her neck. Her lips were pale; her dark eyes quizzical.

As she stepped forward out of the doorway a small white animal whisked into the room. She picked it up—a ferret, snow white but for its bright red eyes. It nestled against her deep, full bosom, watching

them all intently. Back in Thorne's memory something stirred.

Her glance went past him to Cawder, standing beside the girl, and she smiled. " 'In the old age black was not counted fair,' " she quoted, " 'or if it were, it bore not beauty's name.' My husband is an old-fashioned man, Mr. Thorne. But I forget —you know him almost as well as I do. You were boys together, sharing your hopes and ideals. I should like to talk to you about those days."

There was a tension in Cawder's voice—almost nervousness. "I hope you will accept my apology, Roger, and stay here until your arm has healed. Grace has had training as a nurse, and we have everything that will be needed." He tried to force a hearty note:

"We have a lot to talk about, old boy! It's been fifteen years since we had a bull session.

Thorne shifted his feet uneasily. He had apparently stepped into the middle of a particularly nasty triangle. He studied the girl: she was younger than he had thought at first, and she felt every word the other two spoke. "Cawder's slut" they called her in the village. It was an ugly name, and he wondered that she could have earned it or that she could stay here, brazening out her position, flaunting herself in the face of the older woman who was John Cawder's wife.

HOW she felt about it was something no man could read from her dark face and sleeping eyes. Her gibe at her husband showed that there was no pretense between them, and she seemed to treat the girl with contemptuous tolerance. It must be unendurable for a proud woman to have to live in this atmosphere: he wondered why she stood it as she had. Money, perhaps—or love. If she could stick it out, he decided he could.

"I'm no soaring eagle like the great John Cawder," he replied dryly. "I've never delighted the crowned heads of Europe and Park Avenue, but I've made the kind of mark I wanted to make—I've enjoyed doing it—and I'm satisfied with it. I suppose I may as well stay if you want me; after all, I came here to see you. I suppose you're painting still?"

Cawder's laugh was short. "Painting? Naturally. I find my—inspiration—here; I have to paint. You'll see some of it later. But you're being too modest: we're versatile here—we like to keep in touch with the outside world even if we don't have much to do with it. My wife has followed your work with a great deal of interest. Roger—strange as that may seem."

Her eyes were on him, dark and inscrutable. "I know more of Mr. Thorne's work than you may think, John," she said softly. "I've had more than one occasion in the past to concern myself with mathematics, you know. Thorne's Functions open an entirely new world to those who understand them."

That, Thorne decided, was pure bravado. Not six men in America were equipped to use Thorne's Functions understandingly. But she had called the play: he would follow her lead.

"I'd like to talk with you about that, Mrs. Cawder," he said. "It's rare to find a woman who is acquainted with my field. Perhaps you can give me some ideas."

Cawder seemed to find that amusing; shut up in this place, miles from anywhere, his wife certainly had few chances to keep up with advances in esoteric science. Involuntarily Thorne's eyes turned to the girl, and what he saw brought him up short. There was fear in her thin, white face: fear—for him! Her eyes were warning him—and at the same time hoping that he would stay and play out his part in Cawder's game. Fear—and hope: it was enough for one day.

"I've lost a lot of blood," he said brusquely. "I enjoy your company, but I'll

enjoy it a lot more when I've had a chance to rest and clean up. Do you mind?"

The girl responded. She *was* young: youth was in her long-legged stride as she preceded him up the great central staircase. Her slim shoulders were firm and straight. She was glad to be out of it for a little—glad to leave those two alone.

The house was huge. Grace told him that it had been modeled on the Cawder home place in England, built by John's father after fire had gutted the former mansion and spread to the forest. One whole wing stood empty, and there were no signs of servants. "There are only the three of us," she told him. "One of Kreb's men cooks, or I do." Her fingers rested on his arm. "I'm glad you're staying," she said.

THORNE was up with the birds in the morning. Dinner had been uneventful. Cawder and his wife seemed to have arrived at an understanding which lessened the tension and somehow, he felt uneasily, included him. The artist had been his own brilliant self, obviously delighting in his monologue on the peculiarities of the people and places he had visited during his triumphal course through the capitals of the world, and his wife showed a depth of knowledge and understanding which proved to Thorne's satisfaction that she could not always have been locked away from intellectual circles as she was now. The girl sat quietly and adored.

Thorne had gone to bed early, but not to sleep. His wound pained him, and the whole atmosphere of the place had set him on edge. Usually, under such conditions, he was able to sink himself in his mathematics, but it was long after two o'clock before he had pursued his equations into troubled sleep in which they strove stubbornly to assume conformations and relations which had absolutely nothing to do with the purpose for which they had been developed.

His windows faced the lake. Opposite him was the deserted wing—the wing, he realized suddenly, from which Cawder's wife had appeared as he watched from his mountain top the day before. There was still something about the setup in this house that he did not begin to understand or like, and he wished heartily that he had been content to stay at binoculars' distance.

As he reached the head of the main staircase the door to the opposite wing opened and she stepped out. "John?" Then she recognized him. He was wearing one of Cawder's suits, draped loosely over his slighter frame.

"Mr. Thorne!" she greeted him. "Or should I say Roger? I feel I know you well from all John has told me. You are very much like him in many ways, you know. I thought for a moment that he had come back."

"Back?" What the devil did that mean?

"He and Miss Walton went into town last night. There were some—things—they had to do. We must amuse each other until tonight. I trust you won't be too bored with my company."

Thorne knew his face had reddened—and not with embarrassment. Of all the damned unfeeling things to do! This woman had her trials—more than showed on the surface. The girl was young and a fool, hopelessly infatuated, but there was no excuse for the callousness and downright cruelty Cawder was showing. John Cawder had changed in fifteen years, and with a vengeance!

He tried to sound jovial. "It's a beautiful morning," he observed. "Let's go outside. I'd like a breath of air."

Her somber eyes searched his face; she seemed satisfied at what she found there. "I—can't," she said. "I mean that literally. It's silly, of course—some odd psychosis—John is always twitting me about it—but there it is. I really can't cross the

terrace." She smiled suddenly, a warm, grave smile. "You could carry me across, but I'm afraid Kreb has prevented that."

"Damn Kreb! He should learn to shoot before he tries to scare off trespassers. Is he still around?"

She nodded. "He or one of his men. John wouldn't like to have you leave before he returns. But you wouldn't do that, would you—Roger?"

He squirmed inwardly. She knew as well as he did that Kreb had shot to kill; he knew as well as she why Cawder had gone off with his blonde "secretary"; and here she was, flirting valianting with him as though nothing had happened, playing the gracious hostess. Damn it, he'd play on her side! At this distance Grace Walton appeared much less the injured innocent of the night before. Cawder's slut! He supposed it was love, but it made her cheap and common compared with this woman. Cawder's ninny was more like it!

Breakfast was a silent ritual to the inner man, as breakfast should be. She cooked it, well, they ate it together in a room looking out over the terrace, and they made a comradely ceremony of doing the dishes. One of Kreb's glowering thugs had showed up, but Thorne sent him off and made the best of his one good arm. Kreb's shot had only nicked it, and a day or two would see it well enough.

THEY smoked a cigarette together in the paneled library. Thorne lay back on the big divan, studying her through half-closed eyes. His restless night was catching up with him, and he felt dog-tired. She was no beauty. She was older than Cawder, he thought, but how much older was hard to say. Her skin was clear and soft, her hair as sleek and full of life as though she had been in her teens, but her manner, her eyes, the way she walked and spoke proved her maturity. That might lie at the root of the whole sorry mess, he realized. In college Cawder had been apt to rob the cradle on the rare occasions when he stepped out of his shell and made a gesture toward social amenities. Grace was young and tremendously impressed with him both as a man and an artist. This woman was clearly another sort—someone he had met in Europe, probably, though it was impossible to point to any national background—an intellectual, whose appeal had been to his agile mind. Now that she was his wife he found that he wanted more than intellectual appreciation of his talents: he wanted passion and blind devotion, and in the girl he had found it. He was keeping her, Thorne decided, as a normal man might keep a dog.

No—there was no beauty in John Cawder's wife—but there was something deeper than beauty. Thorne remembered her bitter quotation from one of Shakespeare's sonnets, the night before. The poet had written another phrase—

"My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red:
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damask'd, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks . . ."

Shakespeare had written those lines to his Dark Lady, half bitterly, resenting the attraction which was not physical but something deeper and stronger, which he could not escape, which he could not pass off with a quip and a line as his friends of the Mermaid did their loves of the moment: "And yet by heaven I think my love as rare, as any she beli'd with false compare."

Cawder's wife was a woman like that.

He realized that she was watching him smilingly. "I'm sorry," he blurted. "I juggled equations in my head all night, and I'm afraid I'm not responsible for what

happens now. I've been a very bad companion."

She leaned toward him. She was in white, her dark skin and hair set off by the clinging fabric. "My husband was not joking last night when he said that I am interested in your work," she said. "I have had very little to do with my days here except read and study. I may be more appreciative than you think of the high realms in which your thoughts travel. I may even—help—a little."

Her eyes drew him; their dark depths quieted the half-formed apprehension which had been nagging at him all the morning. This woman was lonely—hungry to understand and be understood—as he was. She was intelligent, and to assume that no woman could follow the arguments involved in an understanding of Thorne's Functions, at least through the earlier steps, was nothing but sheer intellectual snobbishness.

HE TOLD her of his interest in the applications of mathematics to the forefront of theoretical physics: nuclear forces in the atom—the fundamental particles and their properties—and on a cosmically larger scale the functioning of these atomic laws in the birth and death of stars and galaxies. Thorne's Functions were a family of mathematical relations, symmetric in certain variables, which appeared again and again in such problems. His contribution had been the study and definition of their properties, opening in the process an entirely new realm of mathematics. He told her how the tool he had devised was enabling physicists throughout the world to describe and explain forces and phenomena which had hitherto been beyond them, and how now he was seeking the key which would unite their work with the studies of the astro-physicists and provide one universal tool with which to probe the realms of stars as well as atoms.

The opening of the great front door brought him to himself. Cawder was grinning at him from the doorway; the sun had gone from the windows of the library. It was late afternoon.

"You wear my clothes well, Roger." The artist was calmly insolent. "I hope you've found my wife equally—accommodating."

Thorne struggled to his feet. The girl, Grace, was peering anxiously past Cawder's broad shoulders. She looked paler than she had been the night before. And there was something behind the smile on the artist's handsome, haggard face—something cold and determined.

"Your wife is an intelligent woman," he replied savagely. "Probably the most intelligent I have known. I fail to see why she chooses to shut herself away from a world which might appreciate her more than you seem to, but that is, of course, none of my affair. I will be very glad if you will let me leave—in my own clothes—now."

Cawder's guffaw mocked him. That was not his game. "Don't be a fool, Roger! Forget you're a stuffed shirt with your head in a cloud of figures. Of course she's intelligent—I married her—I've lived with her. You don't suppose I gained my enviable reputation as an artist alone, do you? You know the namby-pamby stuff I was doing: that was John Cawder's level. That was all I could do—until I met her. But Cawder's wife was never made for mediocrity. She takes, Roger—but she gives too!" The lines in his face seemed to harden, the mocking light to go out of his eyes. He strode across the room and gripped Thorne's shoulder in his strong, blunt fingers. "You'll never know now, Roger, how much my wife can give." He brushed Thorne's chin playfully with his knuckles. "Don't stand there like a wooden Indian, man! You've lost your sense of humor. Now—dinner—some music to

quiet our digestion—and then I'll show you what I've been painting back here in the wilderness with only these two charming ladies for inspiration. I think you will be interested."

He looked past Cawder's intent face at the two women. The girl's eyes were begging him to go—to leave things as they had been before he blundered in. But Cawder's wife was frozen, her black eyes hard as jet, her full mouth drawn thin. She was watching her husband's every move, like a cornered mouse watching a cat. As Cawder started up the stairs he looked straight at her, and there was no mockery in his voice now.

" '*Two* loves have I', dark lady," he said softly.

AS THE hands on the great clock in the corner of the library crept on toward midnight the tension in Thorne's mind grew. Dinner had again been quiet; there seemed to be some kind of informal truce between Cawder and his wife on such occasions.

They talked of fishing, hunting, the outdoor life in which Thorne had found relaxation. Nothing was said of the artist's work, or of his. Back in the library, before a roaring fire, Grace had revealed a surprising talent on the violin, and Cawder's wife proved herself full mistress of the harp from which her strong, slender fingers brought strange, stirring melodies. Her eyes were on Cawder every minute, hard and bright, defying him. As the haunting notes shuddered away Thorne realized that Grace was crying softly in her corner. He got to his feet.

"I'll see your paintings in the morning, John," he said. "I didn't sleep much last night, and I need it now."

Cawder frowned. Thorne realized that Grace's muffled sobs had stopped, that she was sitting, tense as a strung bow, on the edge of her chair, watching them. "Miss Walton is tired too," he pointed out. "You drive your assistants too hard, John."

Cawder caught him at the top of the stairs. "I won't keep you long," he said. "There is one picture which you must see tonight—now. Grace agrees with me. After that—you're on your own."

Thorne went white. "Damn it!" he snarled. "Why can't you come out in the open? If you think I've been—guilty—of anything with your wife, say so! Let me get out of here—right now—and take her with me. A hell of a lot it matters to you—you and your—secretary!"

John Cawder's eyes were very bright. "I didn't ask you to come here, Thorne," he said quietly. "I did my best to keep you out, short of killing you, and maybe I should have done that. You're here and things have happened that give you a part in our little play. It's one that Shakespeare might have written—and it will be played out tonight. But you were the best friend I had, as a boy—maybe the only friend, except Grace—and we've done our best to give you your chance. There's a limit to that: we've earned our chance too. But there is one more thing I must do, out of decency—out of common humanity. Now come on."

He opened the door to the empty wing, and Thorne followed him silently. There was no electricity here, and the hangings were heavy with dust. Cawder's studio was a long room with a skylight, hung with paintings which Thorne recognized as the work of the artist's last grim period. "Circe" was there: the painting which had aroused so much violent criticism when it was given to the Metropolitan by a man whose own work, though popular, had always been rejected. They were not the type of thing that people would buy, though the man's grim genius lived in them as in few paintings Thorne had ever seen. One by one they sprang to life as Cawder went about the room lighting the oil lamps

with which it was furnished. In every one, as in the fabulous "Circe," the model's back was turned, her face hidden.

One last huge canvas occupied the whole end wall. At first Thorne saw only confused darkness, then, as though his eyes were slowly accustoming themselves to the gloom, details of the painting began to appear. It showed a shadowed room—a huge, vaulted chamber in some medieval hall, black and gloomy—and a sleeper sprawled naked across a canopied bed in troubled sleep. It was a man, his smooth young face agonized and yet somehow brightened by the intensity of his dreams. Bending over him was a shrouded figure—a woman—her face filled with evil satisfaction, drinking in his torment. Her hand lay on his forehead, her lips were parted in a gloating smile, and it seemed to Thorne that a faint mist rose from the sleeper's lips and hovered about her head.

What head it was he knew before Cawder raised the lamp in his hand and cast its rays directly on the painted face—before the door behind him opened and she was silhouetted there, her own face in shadow, its expression hidden: John Cawder's wife.

Cawder was watching him intently. There was something he should know—something this picture and all that had led up to it should tell him: he realized that. But he saw only the cruelty of the man who could paint such a picture of his wife and flaunt it gloatingly before a stranger. What help he could give her was hers!

"Thank you," he said stiffly. "It is very interesting but I prefer your earlier work. I fail to see what this has to do with my decision to leave in the morning."

She stepped aside to let him pass. Her dark face was expressionless, her eyes fixed on her husband. He touched her shoulder lightly as he went by. A moment later, as the door to the empty wing closed behind him, he thought he heard her laughing.

That laugh haunted him as he lay in the darkness, staring at the bare ceiling. In another woman it might have been hysteria, but she was not that kind. There had been triumph in her laugh—an ugly kind of triumph—and for a little he wondered dully what factor in this distorted situation he had missed. His thoughts flicked to the girl, Grace. "Cawder's slut." Old Jim Dawson had spat contemptuously as he said that. But, he realized suddenly, when he spoke of "Cawder's wife" it was with hate!

SLEEP came finally, but not rest. As they had the night before, his Functions began their march through his dreams, arranging and rearranging themselves with a fantastic symmetry which belied every law of known mathematics. His sleeping brain strove to follow their contortions and read meaning into them, for he could see, even in the dream, that they had meaning. It was no use. Soon he had lost all touch with them; they were racing on into realms utterly unimaginable, filled with a bizarre life of their own.

His exasperation at being left behind woke him. It was past midnight. He crawled out of bed, found pencil and paper, and tried to write down the equations of his dream—to trace the development which had eluded him. It was no use.

He heard her footsteps in the hall before the door opened. Her robe clung to her magnificent body like a white mist; her night-black hair lay loose over her shoulders.

She had a candle: there was no electricity in the old wing where her room was. He stumbled to his feet but she pushed him down again into his chair, her strong hand gentle on his shoulder. She bent over him, studying the scribbled papers on the desk, and the musky scent she wore filled his lungs. There was a scrabble of claws on the carpet and a sleek white shape leaped to the desk beside her—the ferret. He had not seen it all day. Its beady eyes were

fixed like her dark ones on the equations he had written.

She pushed the papers aside. He flushed: there was nothing on them—he knew that as well as she did. He took them from her and crumpled them in his good hand, flung them into the corner. The ferret vaulted to the floor and scampered to investigate, sniffing at the ball of paper and looking up to study them with eyes like tiny embers.

She switched off the desk lamp, and the room was dark but for the white moonlight that flooded through the windows. "You must rest," she told him softly. "Your mind is tired; it needs to be given strength —and to be shown the way it has missed. I can do that, if you will let me."

Protest surged up in him. What could she do? What would Cawder think, finding them here together? She touched his forehead. Her hand was cool and dry.

"Come. Lie down here, on the bed, and close your eyes. I will sit here beside you." Her fingers were massaging his temples gently, brushing his eyelids, sweeping away the turmoil that had been in his mind.

"Now look at me—into my eyes—and tell me what you see there."

The moonlight fell on her hair, outlining her head with silver. Her face was in shadow, but her eyes seemed like lighted windows. She was leaning over him, her hands on his shoulders, her lips slightly parted, and it seemed that a kind of glowing vapor was forming about her head and cloaking her shoulders with pale light. Her eyes were enormous: he lifted himself on his good arm to look into them, and her arm went around him, holding him close. The pupils were like windows. He stared deep into them—through them—and saw there a man—himself—sitting at a desk and writing—

IT SEEMED that he was two men: the man at the desk and a second, an outsider, standing invisible and apart, watching the man who wrote. The muddled confusion which had filled his brain was gone. Instead he seemed to have gained an almost magical insight into the mathematical processes which had given birth to his functions, and into the world of mathematics for which they in turn served as a frame of reference. It was an utterly alien world, above and beyond anything he or any other worker in physics had ever imagined: a world to which his functions were as the simple number-system of every day—whose patterns and laws not only expressed but *were* the facts of space and time and matter, over which human intellects had drudged and fumbled. Now, for the first time, it was all clear in his brain—crystal clear—writ in letters of white fire—and as the pencil in the hand of that other self raced and wriggled across the sheets of paper, leaving its trail of cabalistic symbols, ranged tier on tier in neat ranks, he—the real he—the watcher in the shadows—sped on ahead, faster and ever faster, to see and comprehend the whole—the ultimate —the one all-inclusive relation of which all the rest was but a part.

Impatiently he snatched the pencil from the stiff fingers of his scrawling dream-self. It must be caught—set down—before it vanished! He pushed the other rudely aside, and the man turned his face toward him, questioning. His own face—

Mirrored in the man's staring, empty eyes he saw the white face and burning eyes of Cawder's wife.

Light stabbed suddenly in the darkness —and the vision broke. He was in bed—his own bed—propped like a rag doll against the pillows. The woman was beside him, her body pressed against him, her lips fastened to his, her eyes two fathomless pits into which he stared. The strength—the life—was running out of him as though he had been bled. His heart hammered desperately against his ribs; his lungs were struggling to draw in clean air—but the woman's

scent filled them, the woman's eyes drowned out all the world. The light blazed down on them; a hand caught her naked shoulder and wrenched her away—flung her panting back against the footboard of the bed. John Cawder's hand!

To Thorne, lying there against the pillows, it was like one of Cawder's own macabre paintings. Cawder's lined face was like the mask of an avenging godhead. Beyond him the girl was a nymph, her young, clean body wreathed in vapors. And making the third apex of the triangle was the woman—Cawder's wife.

Her face, as she stared up at her husband, was the face of the painting. The face of Circe, evil and greedy—the face of a Medusa, drawn with rage. The ferret had clambered into her arms and lay huddled against her breast. Her lips were redder than fresh blood—her eyes bright as diamonds. Youth, and a kind of beauty flushed her dark cheeks and tautened her proud body. Slowly, contemptuously, she gathered her night robe about her and disappeared.

CAWDER was bending over him; the girl, Grace, was on the other side. He struggled to pull himself erect, but it seemed that the very life had gone out of him. Cawder's face was grim.

"Lead the way, Grace. I'll carry him."

He lay like a baby in Cawder's muscular arms, his head slumped weakly against the artist's shoulders. Their shadows went ahead of them, grotesque and black, gangling along the walls of the corridor. They were in the empty wing now—*her* wing—but they were climbing to the highest floor, their footsteps echoing on the wooden stairs. Grace had lighted an oil lamp; she hurried ahead of them, opening the doors. Thorne saw the light in her blonde hair like a golden halo about her small child's head. Her body was a child's body, slim and delicate.

They had entered a great hall which stretched across the entire wing. Cawder lowered him into a massive armchair and went about the hall, lighting candle after candle. As the little flames leaped up he saw that the hall was lined with paintings—rank after rank of them, lined along its paneled walls. This was not Cawder's work—he knew that.

The girl's arm went around his shoulders, propping him up. She held a tumbler to his lips; he swallowed painfully and the raw liquor hit his stomach like an exploding ball of fire, burning through his body like liquid lightning. He tried to pull himself erect in the chair.

"What happened?" he asked. "What—is she?"

Cawder stood with his feet wide apart, his arms folded, staring down at him. His voice was tired now—resigned. "She's Cawder's wife," he said bitterly. "She has been for three hundred years. You have Grace to thank that she's not your wife. Because friend or no friend, Roger, I was going to let you end the curse that has haunted Cawder men since Elizabeth's time. She could have you—and I would be free. Free of that—vampire—forever!"

He caught at the word. "Vampire?" His hand went feebly to his throat. "You mean she—drank my blood? Is that what has happened to me? Is that why I'm so weak?"

"It's not that simple, Roger. If there is a name for her kind, I don't know it. *Lamia,* perhaps—I don't know. Your blood is safe, though. It's your—life—that she drinks." He shuddered and a shadow passed across his haggard face. "She has sucked at my life for fifteen years."

Thorne's brain throbbed. This nonsense—this craziness—the man was mad! He turned to the girl, and it was in her face too. She nodded: "It's true, Roger.

She had no secrets from me. She's delighted in it—reveled in it—knowing how I would age, and John, and she would be always the same, never changing, never aging—and some day free again to spread her evil in the world."

He buried his aching head in his hands. It was fantastic! And yet—he had not dreamed the thing that had happened—had not dreamed the black pools of her eyes, the pressure of her body against him as she lay there, draining the life-force out of him and filling his brain with those bright visions of power. He closed his eyes, and the equations stood there against the blackness. He would never forget them now: she had promised that. And they were true. He knew that. They were real!

"I had a dream," he told them. "My Functions—things I never saw in them before—things nobody has ever seen. How could that be?"

"That's *it,* Roger!" Cawder's voice was patient. "It's what has happened, time and again, to me—to my father—to every Cawder man for three centuries, and to God knows how many poor devils before us. It's what she *is,* Roger—what she was made for—and it's hell alive! Call her vampire—call her one of the Muses—call her anything you like: she takes for everything she gives. She'll drain the genius from you until you're a withered husk—she'll fatten and grow sleek on it like a blood-sucking cat, and you'll grow old and lean and haunted, like the rest of us. She's too fine and proud for anything but genius. There's more—life—more ectoplasm, or whatever the stuff is that she needs, in men with brains. And she can pick your brains—inspire you—make you great, but the greater you are the more she demands, until you're burnt out or mad or dead."

Grace touched his arm. "Do you think you can stand now, Roger? There's something we have to show you—something that may help you to believe."

ONE on each side, they dragged him across the floor to the line of paintings. Many of them were dark with age—none of them were recent—but out of them all the same face looked: her face. The lamplight picked one out: a woman in medieval dress, gazing quizzically over her shoulder, fondling a white ferret that lay against her breast. It was the picture that had leaped to his mind when he first saw her, standing in the doorway of the library—the picture she had made, crouched on the bed, staring up at her husband.

"Da Vinci painted that." Cawder's arm was around him, bracing him, but the life was coming back into his body. "He knew her as Cecilia Gallerani; she has had many names. It hung in Cracow before the war. It was smuggled into Greece and then to Cairo. I bought it there—as I have bought these others. They've known her all through history—there, in that Egyptian portrait of Alexander's time—in that Greek marble—in paintings and sculpture by the greatest artists mankind has known. She made them great: she drank their life and paid them in fame, in glory. She feeds on glory as she feeds on life. She—withers—without it.

"It's not only artists—there have been poets, dramatists, musicians, statesmen—any form of greatness draws her. Shakespeare knew her, and he knew what she was. It's in his sonnets:

'Two loves I have of comfort and despair,
Which like two spirits do suggest me still:
The better angel is a man right fair,
The worser spirit a woman colour'd ill.
To win me soon to hell, my female evil
Tempteth my better angel from my side,
And would corrupt my saint to be a devil,
Wooing his purity with her foul
pride . . .'

And further on:

'For I have sworn thee fair, and thought thee bright,
Who are as black as hell, as dark as night!' "

Cawder's voice had sunk to a husky whisper, and the girl's fingers were biting into Thorne's arm. "We've kept her for three hundred years, Roger. We've kept her to ourselves—away from other men—ever since that first Cawder man was cursed with her long years ago. We've passed her from father to son—Cawder's wife—since Shakespeare's time. Cawder's wife: but not the mother of Cawder men! We're bastards—every man of us—and proud of it! She's had no men but us for three centuries, and we've known her for what she is. We've found our own mates and bred our sons, and laughed in her face! Oh, she's tried—she's tempted us—she's played with our talents and made us seem great—but we've never given in, and we've never let her go. Never—until now."

The man's arm tightened around Thorne's shoulders. "I tried to do it, Roger. You had the genius she needs: she'd take you, and be content—and I'd be free. It was our chance, Grace's and mine, and I tried to take it. I left you to her—for a day and a night—but you were Roger Thorne. You were the boy I knew in college—the man whose climb I have watched all through the years, free, without the kind of black, evil help I needed—without *her*. I had to come back—I had to show you the painting—to give you that one chance to see and understand—but I couldn't tell you." The man was pleading. "I couldn't. It was my chance—our chance—and I had to take it. You were blind: maybe she blinded you, or maybe it was your own logic, for there's no logic in this thing—no science or mathematics—only madness, and evil, that's lasted through all eternity. Because she's lived forever; I know that. *She's lived forever!*"

She laughed then, softly and cruelly. She stood in the doorway behind him, the ferret cradled in her arms like a familiar spirit, its red eyes intent. "Yes, Roger," she mocked, "I've lived forever. I'm Lilith—Circe—all the women who have bred genius into the starveling race of men! Without me you'd be beasts, wallowing in the forests for grubs. Without me there would have been no beauty—no glory—no power. And I'll live on—forever—with men who have the courage of their genius! With the Leonardo's and Shakespeares of this world, not with the sniveling, cowardly race of Cawder! I'll make you great, Roger Thorne: you know that. I'll put you on a pinnacle where you'll overshadow Newton and Einstein and every man who has ever lived in the world of mathematics. Or if greatness means nothing to you, I can open that world you glimpsed tonight—open it wide. It's in your grasp, Roger Thorne—in your little human brain—but without me it will lie there dead. You will always know that, after tonight, remember. You will always seek it—you will labor away your years in search of it—but unless I lead you, Roger, you will never find it. I think you know that too."

IT WAS like one of Cawder's own macabre tableaux: the woman, the white beast cradled in her dusky arms—and they three under the painting that mirrored her: Cawder, a whitened mummy of a man; Grace Walton, shivering with fear; and himself, a flabby-legged husk sucked dry of his manhood. It was true—this whole mad story. He licked his parched lips.

"You were gone, John. Why didn't you stay? Why did you come back—to her?"

The woman's eyes were bits of bright jet, hard and triumphant. "Why didn't you go, John?" she mocked. "Why didn't you take your yellow-haired moon-calf and go? Because you couldn't! Because no Cawder can. Because you have my blood —the blood of my kind—in your veins. Because even in that small degree you are my kind. Because you love me, John Cawder, and will always love me. For all your other women—for all your bastards—Cawder is Cawder, and always will be, and Cawder men will always return to—Cawder's wife!"

Thorne had felt the girl's slight body grow rigid against his side as the woman spoke. He knew what it must mean to her—what it had meant for all the months she had been here, knowing this and accepting it: Cawder's slut, but never Cawder's wife.

She moved like an uncoiled spring. The lamp stood on a little table beside her, and she hurled it straight at the woman's head. It struck a foot from her and burst, showering kerosene into the flames of the candles. Instantly a sheet of flame had walled her in.

For a moment he saw her standing there, frozen, the ferret writhing savagely in her arms. Fear was drawing the blood out of her face. He saw ugly shadows come under her staring eyes, and black lines of terror creep down past the corners of her mouth. He saw her shoulders, sag, and knowledge of death come to her. Immortal she might be, but not in the face of fire.

Then the doorway was empty. Above the crackle of the flames he heard her footsteps fleeing down the hall. It was they who were trapped—they who would burn for her sins. Then John had him by the arm, and his own feet were moving clumsily, carrying him along. There were doors opening on the narrow gallery that ran across the front of the house. Grace went first, then he, then Cawder, the ruddy light of the burning room throwing his giant's shadow out across the ragged lawn. He saw the moon, great and white over the mountain. Men were shouting and running down there—Kreb's men—Cawder's guards.

The balcony was narrow; they edged along it toward the center of the building. Kreb's men were pushing up a ladder, and one of them was running up it like a squirrel. Thorne suddenly missed the girl, then he himself was picked up bodily and lowered into the night. His feet scrabbled on slippery rungs; his fingers clamped on the ladder's uprights; strong hands caught and held him. And Cawder's form was coming down after him, silhouetted against the blazing building.

In the fire-light the pattern on the terrace seemed to writhe and caper with a life of its own. He knew now what it was, and where he had seen it. It was a thing the Romans had known, and likely the Picts before them—a barrier against evil—a boundary which no spirit or god or devil could pass, save by invitation. He remembered that first morning: she could not cross the terrace, but he could have carried her.

AND then he saw her there, in the black hollow of the doorway. There was no fear in her now. She stood watching them, tall, white, unafraid. Her eyes were on them: they found him, and he felt the blood pound in his temples. He took a step toward her; stumbled and fell to his knees on the pavement, at the edge of the mosaic band. She smiled, and her gaze flicked past: to the girl, to Kreb—to Cawder.

He heard his own voice croaking, "John! For God's sake—John!" He heard the girl's voice whimpering, "John! Don't do it—John." He saw John Cawder walking like a man in a dream, his sunken

eyes fixed on the woman who was his wife, who waited in the shadow of the doorway, his feet stepping carefully between the tendrils of the pattern. They stood together for a moment, then Cawder's strong arms swept her up and they were coming back. Her arms were around his neck; her black hair veiled them as her mouth found his. He stopped, his feet at the very edge of the mosaic, and they saw his own arms tighten about her body, his head bend over her. Then he had turned and with quick, young steps was striding through the doorway, into the burning house.

The girl was young: she would get over it. The forest would cover the blackened scar where Cawder's house had stood; the winds would scatter the ashes of Cawder and Cawder's wife. Thorne knew now what that fanning scar on the mountainside had meant, and what an earlier Cawder had tried—and failed—to do. But as he sat at his desk, tracing slowly the symbols which she had drawn from him, he wondered how much of them came from himself and how much from her. She was not human; he believed that. She might be more than human, of a breed which humanity had hunted down and made to pay for its strangeness. Her blood was in men's veins, and some day by the strange lottery of genesis her race might be born again, decades—centuries from now—when the world would be ready for it.

"IS GOD DEAD?"

(as this war grows worse Americans are asking that question)

Well, I can say to them that God is most certainly NOT dead for I TALKED WITH GOD, and as a result of that little talk with God a strange Power came into my life. After 42 years of horrible, dismal, sickening failure, everything took on a brighter hue. It's fascinating to talk with God, and it can be done very easily once you learn the secret. And when you do—well—there will come into your life the same dynamic Power which came into mine. The shackles of defeat which bound me for years went a-shimmering—and now—?—well, I own control of the largest daily newspaper in our County, I own the largest office building in our City, I drive a beautiful Cadillac limousine. I own my own home which has a lovely pipe-organ in it, and my family are abundantly provided for after I'm gone. And all this has been made possible because one day, ten years ago, I actually and literally talked with God.

You, too, may experience that strange mystical Power which comes from talking with God, and when you do, if there is poverty, unrest, unhappiness, or ill-health in your life, well—this same God-Power is able to do for you what it did for me. No matter how useless or helpless your life seems to be—all this can be changed. For this is not a human Power I'm talking about—it's a God-Power. And there can be no limitations to the God-Power, can there? Of course not. You probably would like to know how you, too, may talk with God, so that this same Power which brought me these good things might come into your life, too. Well—just write a letter or a postcard to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 116, Moscow, Idaho, and full particulars of this strange Teaching will be sent to you free of charge. But write now—while you are in the mood. It only costs one cent to find out, and this might easily be the most profitable one cent you have ever spent. It may sound unbelievable—but it's true, or I wouldn't tell you it was.—Advt. Copyright, 1942, Frank B. Robinson.

Its owner warned that the wig had certain strange peculiarities—not subject to reasonable explanation.

A Wig for Miss DeVore

By AUGUST DERLETH

SHEILA DEVORE was a glamor girl whose platinum blonde hair and languorous smile outshone any other's on the silver screen. Quite a girl! She occupied more attention in the minds of thousands of young and old men than she had any right to occupy. She had eyes of baby blue with a come-on slant, and she had curves that haunted many an uneasy dreamer. Her pictures were on the screen magazines, on the cigarette ads ("Miss DeVore smokes nothing but Flam-

beaux! 'I never assume a role until I am assured my supply of Flambeaux is at hand to protest my throat, my bronchial tubes, and my photogenic value.' "), and even on the confession magazine covers; and she was the subject of an oft-reprinted biography telling all about her beginnings, her debut into society, her escape from the rich home that had been hers, her longing for fame, to do her part for society by entertaining the millions of underprivileged, etc., etc.

A BEAUTIFUL story! Unfortunately, it sprang full-bodied from the imagination of her publicity agent.

Actually, Sheila DeVore was born plain Maggie Mutz in a little Missouri town whose chief claim to fame was that an Indian chief had once stopped there on his way to be massacred. She was a mistress of false frontage, and knew how to hog any picture in which she took part, throwing around her curves (which were the only genuine thing about her) in a way calculated to distract the attention of anything human from the only real acting in the picture—not Miss DeVore's, of course. She had a background which would have put Herbert Asbury's Hatrack into a wild scramble for her humble fame, and even now she was the subject and the object of plenty of gossip—some self-initiated. Publicity, after all, being what it is, and considered so necessary. Among her intimates in Hollywood she was fondly known by a five-letter word which the law says it is illegal to call anyone no matter how many witnesses are ready to testify.

She forgot her parents and let her father die in the poor-farm. She divorced her first—and only—husband, and ruined his reputation. She could not bear to let alone the poor deluded promoter who was responsible for putting her on the road to fame, but managed to shorten his life by a prolonged suit for the return of such money as she had paid him in that first flush of gratitude which accompanied sight of her name in bright lights. She was as selfish as an inhibited pack-rat, and had never heard of moral scruples. As for ethics—there was no room for ethics in her profession. She was, in short, one of those people for whom there does not seem to be any excuse for permitting them to continue an existence which is giving them no pleasure, and is burdening others far too much. However, on the other side of the ledger, there were those countless thousands of palpitating hearts in the darkened theatres of the land, watching that curvaceous morsel of femininity fling her weight around in picture after picture, loving and being loved, as if it were all the real thing and Miss DeVore were not getting a cool four grand a week to play roles which women like her and all female cats are by nature fully qualified to play without acting.

And at the moment, too, there was Herbert Bleake. Herbert was a good-natured, addle-pated playboy, who saw Sheila DeVore's toothsome map in a screen magazine and immediately took a plane out to Hollywood to see her. Sheila would never have seen him, but her publicity agent saw him first. After all, that story about the attempted robbery of her apartment had already been forgotten, and that touching release about how Sheila had given a ten thousand-dollar home to her old mother (complete with picture, posed by an underpaid extra and a rented house, her real mother having been dead five years) was getting pretty well around, and it was time for something new in the life of the darling of America's repressed males. So Herbert was it; he was seized upon by the publicity agent, photographed descending from a liner of the air, shown with a great armful of flowers, and finally, with Sheila DeVore, all for the purpose of screaming headlines: "RICH PLAYBOY MAKES

BEELINE FOR HOLLYWOOD AFTER SEEING DEVORE'S PIX!

What a story!

FOR weeks Sheila DeVore's publicity agent could count upon seeing that inane and rather vacuous face looking out from behind that armful of roses, or fatuously at Sheila, staring up from the newspapers and magazines, and after that, there was always the run-around that could be given the gossip columnist, Arabella Bearst. She would be good for a couple hundred lines about the tantalizing possibilities of Sheila DeVore's engagement, wedding to and break with Herbert Bleake to keep the matter running through all the yellow sheets for two months thereafter—if Sheila DeVore could hold out that long—which was doubtful.

In any case, there was Herbert, and Sheila had to treat him with a modicum of decency, however difficult it might be, while she devised some way to get rid of him. Preferably something spectacular—like a brawl at the Actors' Lagoon, when the photographers were present. Alas! for Herbert—he had his coming, and he might have known.

Sheila DeVore would never have believed that she had hers coming, too—long overdue, to be sure. And she would have burst into raucous Maggie Mutz laughter if someone had told her that Herbert was the instrument of fate, her nemesis, and so on. But there it was; the Fates had cut the pattern, and there was nothing to do but for the unwitting actors to play their parts.

Sheila had been cast in the role of Meg Peyton, the Soho murderess: four dead men, a leg show for the jury, and acquittal. A color picture for which she would need red hair, for the real Meg Peyton had worn red hair, and, moreover, she had worn a wig—brighter than auburn. She stamped her pretty foot and said she could not go into the role without the proper accoutrements—by which she meant the wig; and she ranted and raved for a day or so about the necessity of having it. She would have forgotten all about it, had her director not rebelled and said she should shut her silly mouth and get on to the work in hand. That was too much for her, and that night she poured her heart's desire into Herbert's flapping ears, and before dawn there was a cablegram on the way to Herbert's London agent, and within forty-eight hours more, Meg Peyton's wig had been leased for a huge sum from a London exhibitor and was on its way to Sheila DeVore.

Her publicity agent went into ecstasies.

Herbert was childishly happy.

Sheila preened herself and posed for some sober-faced pictures and gave out noble statements: "I could not feel that I could do my best work without something of this nature to inspire me!"

The wig arrived, was duly photographed on and off Sheila DeVore (good for several hundred rotogravure shots, and a dragged-out existence in the screen magazines), and the picture went into production. Sheila DeVore in SOHO MEG, or THE TITIAN MURDERESS.

NOT a word about the letter that came with the wig. Sheila read it, committed it to memory, and destroyed it without saying anything about it. She did not think it important, and memorized it only because it was reasonably short and a little curious. Her publicity agent would have torn his hair if he could have realized what a first-rate story she was passing up. The letter concerned the real Meg Peyton, and said of her that she had not originally been anything more than a poor artist's model, but that, after the loss of her hair, she had acquired her red wig, and her change of character more or less coincided with that date. Moreover, there were certain suggestions which went over Sheila DeVore's head like a balcony. For instance—that the

wig should not be worn more than a few minutes at a time; that it should be kept out of sight; that it had certain "properties" not subject to reasonable explanation. And so forth. Naturally, the fancies of its present owner were no concern of Sheila DeVore's.

The wig was really a beauty. It was made of real hair, beyond question; indeed, it seemed to have come from a single head —in what manner a sensitive person would not have wanted to guess. Moreover, it was beautifully preserved; in age, it was said to date far back, to certain Central American Indians—which was completely beyond Sheila DeVore's limited ken. In fact, it was such a striking thing that Sheila DeVore painted her eyebrows and announced that, in the custom of Charles Laughton and other notables, she was going to wear the wig and impregnate herself with the character of Meg Peyton, so that she could more effectively portray her role—which she insisted upon treating as something to stand beside the roles of Lady MacBeth, Portia, and Ophelia. With the cooperation of her agent, of course, and of Herbert—though he was getting the brush-off but was not at the moment sufficiently alert to correctly interpret the signs. After all, he had done his work, and there was no reason to be obtuse about it.

But Herbert was obtuse. He was so fatuous as to believe he had won Sheila DeVore, and actually gave himself airs on the strength of it. Sheila admitted to herself that he was rapidly becoming a nuisance with whom she would have to cope sooner or later. Fortunately—or unfortunately, as the case may be—for Herbert, she was at the time much too wrapped up in the titian wig, both figuratively and literally.

She went everywhere in the wig—with an entire new wardrobe to go along. She was photographed from Hollywood to New York, getting out of the plane in Chicago, eating at the Savoy, dancing at the Trianon, and, of course, in various stills from the picture. It was wonderfully exciting, and she felt an exhilaration she had never known before. She felt something more, too—something that took possession of her in the few hours during which she was alone.

It was a curious delusion, or rather, a succession of delusions, beginning with the conviction that she was not alone in her rooms, that someone was there with her, someone she could only fancy that she saw. Her fancies were real enough, at any rate; once or twice she was certain she saw someone lurking in the vicinity of the stand where she kept the wig; so that presently she was convinced that someone meant to steal her titian treasure. This hallucination made a wonderful press release, though there was one annoying aftermath, when the story got around to Meg Peyton's home town; that was an urgent cablegram from Grigsby Heather, the owner of the wig, that it be returned immediately.

NATURALLY, Sheila DeVore ignored Heather's unreasonable demand.

The hallucinations, however, increased, and one evening, when the picture had got about halfway along, she had a particularly strange experience. She was sitting at her dressing table preparing to go out, and had just adjusted the titian wig over her closely-cropped platinum hair, when she saw bending above her someone she at first took to be her maid. Indeed, she went so far as to give a casual order, when something about the creature's dress caught her eye: a colorful, spangled costume worn loosely over the shoulder in a kind of ceremonial manner, a band about its head; and at the same moment she was conscious of the face of a very old man, seamy with wrinkles, horny and swarthy, like a gypsy's face, and of the man's long, gnarled, titian hair. For just one instant she had this

vision; then the creature at her back seemed to dissolve like a fog and settle down upon her to vanish into her own shapely chassis.

The most extraordinary thing about it was that, while at the moment of her vision, Sheila DeVore was frightened out of her small allotment of wits, as soon as the creature had made its strange disappearance, she was not at all disturbed: a transition so rapid that she had actually put out her hand to ring for her maid, and arrested her movement in midair, as the vision at her back vanished.

It was at about this time too that her intimates began to notice a change in Sheila DeVore. Her claws seemed to have grown sharper and more expert, even her most casual glance seemed dangerously predatory, and her manner, when she walked into a public place, was cat-like, as if she were a huntress after bigger game than that which formerly interested her. But, of course, the most startling mutation which took place in the character of Sheila DeVore was a sudden, unprecedented craving for raw meat, preferably the comparatively fresh hearts of such fowl and animals as she was normally accustomed to eat in a more civilized fashion.

Even her publicity agent could not make use of this. Indeed, he did everything in his power to hush the matter up, but of course, there was Arabella Bearst, who had had her feelings hurt by Sheila (as who hadn't!), and she hinted at it in her column, so that millions of Americans read it and began to wonder.

By this time, Grigsby Heather was in a dither. He sent Herbert a long message saying flatly that Herbert must get the wig away from Miss DeVore at once, without delay, under pain of the gravest consequences. "The thing carries a revenant with it," he wrote. "And there is great danger in wearing it. I should never have permitted it to leave my possession, but I was assured that Miss DeVore would wear it only a short time each day." And so on. Herbert, being a rich playboy, looked upon any matter of the "gravest consequence," as something like a court battle; he had survived many of them, and estimated that he would survive this one, especially since it could be fought at long range. As for the "revenant," he wondered about that. Frankly, Herbert was far more educated in biological lines than in words of three-syllables. He looked it up in the dictionary. "One returned from the dead or from exile, etc." Not very illuminating, he thought. Undoubtedly Heather had got the wrong word.

Nevertheless, he asked his valet what a revenant was.

Unlike Herbert, his valet had several degrees, on the strength of which he had been hired. "A revenant is something left over," he explained. "Well, sort of like a ghost —if you know what I mean."

"No, I don't," admitted Herbert with that characteristic bluntness he could afford to manifest before those whose checks he signed.

"Well, it's like this. If I died, and left something of my character or personality in this room—why, that would be a revenant."

"I see," said Herbert.

He pondered this for a week, and then returned to his original hypothesis: that Heather had got hold of the wrong word —the imbecile!

SOON there came another letter from Heather, via Clipper. He said frankly that if it had not been for wearing the wig, Meg Peyton would never have committed those murders. Moreover, there was much more to those murders than ever got into print—a peculiarly horrible feature which was a common practise among the priesthood of the Aztec Indians of Mexico in making the blood sacrifice to the Sun God. Herbert's knowledge of the Aztecs was

about as profound as the average man's knowledge of outermost cosmos.

That lack was unfortunate for Herbert.

Things had come to a pretty pass indeed, insofar as Sheila DeVore was concerned. Her passion for raw meat was unabated, indeed—it was getting quite out of hand. Moreover, she was becoming a veritable tower of selfishness: she was not to be crossed, not to be thwarted, not to be gainsaid in anything. She fired her maid, her cook, her housekeeper, her butler, and her gardener, and she was alone on that fateful night when Herbert came to remonstrate with her about this revolting habit of hers.

He rang the bell, but no one answered.

He peered in through the window, and saw her sitting at her dressing-table, titian wig and all. But that was not all he saw. In the glass beyond her he saw a most awful caricature of a face: not the face of a woman at all—but that of a horrible, wrinkled old man, with incredibly evil eyes—and worse—it was in that place where the face of Sheila DeVore ought to have been. He cried out, and Sheila turned. Fortunately for Herbert's sanity, it was the familiar face that looked out at him.

She came to let him in, rather petulantly, and then went back to her dressing-table, Herbert dogging her heels. But she was not dressing. She was fascinated by a curious stone instrument, like a horseshoe with a handle on it, which she said she had been compelled to buy in an antique shop in San Francisco only the previous day. It was like nothing Herbert had ever seen before, but since Herbert's attention had been exclusively for banks, women, yachts, and high life in general, that was no wonder.

It was like nothing Sheila had ever seen before, either—and yet, she could not help thinking, she had known the feel of this tool before. She would know what to do with it if the time came.

Clearly, it was psychologically the wrong moment for Herbert to open up about his complaint. But he did, with a witlessness characteristic of him. Sheila said not a word. She turned around slowly and looked at him. One look out of those eyes was enough to stop his words in his throat, they were not the eyes of Sheila DeVore—they were the eyes he had seen in the glass. He swallowed hard and got up.

With paralyzing rapidity Sheila struck.

Then, with the utmost composure, she proceeded to put to its designed use the curious instrument from the antique shop.

And she was sly. It was not until a week after the disappearance of her publicity agent, who made something of the same mistake Herbert did, that Herbert's body was discovered, and two days later, the agent's. That discovery rocked Hollywood, and then California, and then the nation, with repercussions that spread across the seas. One headline after the other—STAR OF SOHO MEG INVOLVED IN MURDER MYSTERY; DEATHS RECALL MEG PEYTON MURDERS—and so on.

But always there was something concealed, something secret: a kind of hush-hush. Something that did not get out, though Arabella Bearst hustled her 350-pound self around to dig it out. Some juicy morsel of scandal that Arabella might miss. "The condition of the bodies." Something about the condition of the bodies. But no one would talk. Miss DeVore was clapped into quod, and from there was taken quietly to an asylum for the rest of her days.

ARABELLA BEARST was fit to be tied. And then Grigsby Heather hove onto the scene. At first he would say nothing. He got his wig; he shipped it back to London. But Arabella was not to be put off forever, and she was a master of the trip-up. She cornered Heather one day at the railroad station and flashed the instrument "found in Miss DeVore's possession."

"How curious!" exclaimed Heather ex-

citedly. "Wherever did you find it?"

"What is it?" asked Arabella, with her dimples at their best.

"Why, it's a sacrificial tool of the Aztec priests. Mexico, you know. That's the instrument with which they cut out the living hearts of their human sacrifices."

Arabella was a woman who never forgot a slight, however unimportant. And she had it in for Sheila DeVore, no matter where she was. As soon as possible her column blossomed out with a cutting little line: "Ask Sheila DeVore, one-time screen star, how she enjoyed the heart of Herbert Bleake!"

That was too much for even her employer.

If Sheila DeVore had been in any position to appreciate it, she would have enjoyed knowing that Arabella Bearst was in the market for a job, thanks to Sheila's titian wig.

Arabella Bearst's employer was needlessly impulsive. No one would have guessed from her column that, far from captivating the heart of Herbert Bleake—or for that matter, of her publicity agent—Sheila DeVore had followed the prevailing custom among the Aztecs—and eaten it, raw.

Avalon

By JANICE HALL QUILLIGAN

STARS do not shine at Avalon
Nor raindrops fall on velvet lawns,
Through lonely days and endless years
I've witnessed half a million dawns.

The house is old and thick with dust,
The sagging steps are green with moss,
The cobbled paths stretch to the sea
Where bits of driftwood idly toss.

There is no life at Avalon
The birds have fled and all is still,
But I, the ghost called Might Have Been,
Yet wander on a nearby hill.

It is bad form to murder one's customers. But the ancient Chinese alchemist had other, more subtle methods with which to take care of his country's invaders.

The Man Who Amazed Fish

By FRANK OWEN

THROUGH the lattice-work screen, Doctor Shen Fu watched the Japanese officer enter "The Drug Shop of a Thousand Years." In his heart was a sharp sword but his face was bland as he walked out to meet the smug little man.

"I am the proprietor, Doctor Shen Fu," he said aloofly.

"And I, General Nishikori, in charge of this district."

The Doctor nodded but he did not bow. He stood tall and straight as a bamboo reed, despite his years. He was shrewd, a Han-lin graduate, a famed alchemist who had discovered the secret of immortality, so he spoke without fear.

"The district needs no one to take charge of it. It has been Chinese soil for countless centuries and so forever shall it remain, unless by some fantastic power you are able to carry it back to Nippon."

The stunted general wondered whether he should be insulted and claim that he had lost face. It was the usual trick of his people but he turned from it. He could make better use of the famed Doctor by treating him with a modicum of respect. Therefore, he ate bitterness and managed a somewhat bilious-looking smile.

"I wish tea," he said.

"This is a drug shop, not a tea house."

"Nevertheless, I wish tea."

The Doctor said gently, "I accept your command. Tea shall it be."

A clerk went to fetch the divine beverage, and though he was overly long, the General made no comment. He could afford to be patient since he had caused this noted Doctor of Hangchow to bend to his will.

Finally the tea was ready and the clerk brought a small table and one chair.

"Will you not join me?" asked General Nishikori.

"Alas, I had seven cups before you came. I can drink no more."

"At least sit at the table with me," said the General. He was provoked beyond reason but he did not show it. "I have important matters to discuss with you."

"I prefer to stand."

"And if I command?"

"I will obey, but I will not listen. The heart is without fear. If you have come to me for help, choose your words well. I was walking this earth, a free man even before your grandfather was born. I refuse to cringe before his grandson. Honor should be bestowed upon age as well as bombs, the firing squad and poison gas."

The General's education had been extensive. He repeated maneuvers by rote. But here was a set of circumstances that had not been drilled into him. He tried to sit straight and tall, drawing his back up till it looked as though his neck was being goose-stretched. He was a member of the Bushido. He loomed large in his own im-

portance but he avoided looking in mirrors. He resented the fact that Doctor Shen Fu was so very tall, he hated to have the Doctor towering over him as he sipped his tea. He found it unpalatable.

"The tea is bitter," he said fretfully.

"Unfortunately, for years we, of China, have been drinking only bitter tea."

"Our Japanese tea is fragrant."

"Drink of it well, while you have the opportunity."

"It is ill-advised for the conquered to threaten."

"Why threaten? I might have poisoned the tea had I so desired."

MR. NISHIKORI had a bad moment but he did not show it. "I hope you did not," he said, "I am too important to my nation to die."

"That is debatable. However, you were served naught but bitter tea. I cannot be untrue to business tradition. It is bad form to murder one's customers."

"A customer, yes, and one who can pay well."

"With what?"

"Chinese money."

"I cannot accept money that has blood on it. Rather pay me in rice."

"It would be unwise. You might feed it to the poor. Starving people are more easily overcome. They have little opposition in them. Our new order in East Asia must be established."

"By undernourishment."

"I am General Nishikori. I will not be defied. My word is supreme law in Hangchow. You can be of service to my soldiers. And I repeat you will be well-paid."

"For treachery."

"No, for certain drugs that I need."

"Then you must pay in rice."

"Should I hand you over to a firing squad?"

"It matters little. I have solved the riddle of immortality. Your bullets could do no more that wound me severely. But in time I would recover. However, I do not presume to decide such weighty problems for you. Though if I am shot, your chances of getting drugs are nil. Speak quickly, I have other customers entering the shop."

"Throw them out!" the general stormed.

"No, their wishes shall be attended to while you finish your tea." As he spoke, Doctor Shen Fu turned and walked over to greet the newcomers. Usually he left the tending of shop to clerks well-versed in the intricacies of the pharmacopia, but not now, for he wanted to throw Nishikori's pomp in his face. For a thousand years Shen Fu's ancestors had ruled over this drug shop with its large areas of ground that were used for warehouses, clerk's homes and gardens, besides a considerable reserve for the herd of deer whose horns were ground up to make important and popular medicines.

A rich man was desirous of purchasing ginseng tonic, one of the most expensive preparations in all the world for ginseng is the medicine par excellence, the *dernier resort* when all drugs fail. A few drops of ginseng will raise the dead to life. And it is even whispered that after three centuries the ginseng root changes into a man with white blood.

Doctor Shen Fu measured out the life-giving fluid with reverence though he knew that as a restorative it was somewhat overrated. The drug was about forty percent tonic and sixty percent folklore and legend, still it was worth ten times its weight in pure gold and so not to be handled carelessly.

A coolie wanted some powdered dragon's bones to reduce his child's fever. Dr. Shen Fu made no charge to the poor man but added the cost to the sum for the ginseng, since the rich man was better able to pay.

Before returning to General Nishikori,

he surveyed the familiar scenes about him, the black enameled boards with golden characters, containing suitable proverbs. The shelves filled with rows of blue and white procelain jars with square pewter covers containing various liquids of an array of colors. Vermilion medicines were those eagerly sought for by the sick. Above, on the upper shelves were smaller octagonal-based jars containing sundry expensive seeds, or ready-mixed powders. It was the custom of Doctor Shen Fu to give advice free to those too poor to afford a doctor.

Intense hatred gnawed at the Doctor's heart. All this might be swept away, lost forever, if something were not done to stem the vicious Jap flood. He stood for an instant before the tiny alcove that sheltered the altar to Shen Nung, the God of Healing. The smoke of burning incense spiraled languidly upward as though to foretell that some day China would sweep out her invaders with the broom of circumstances. But could the old Drug Shop be saved? That was a moot question.

SHEN FU'S face was a mask as leisurely he returned to General Nishikori who appeared as puffed up with venom as an adder. Nevertheless, he swallowed his pride though it was harder than gulping a live toad.

"Take me to a room where we may speak without interruption," he said and there was silk in his tone. But he could not help adding, "If we remain here I may be forced to order your execution."

"That is hardly a prelude for a satisfactory conversation," the doctor said gently. "However, your command shall be obeyed, come." As he spoke, he led the way through a steep, winding hall of unusual length, until they entered a windowless room, at the far end of which a single candle burned feebly.

"See," said Shen Fu, "the candle weeps, it weeps for China." As he spoke, a heavy, brass-studded teakwood door swung closed and they were wrapped in silence.

The sudden change from daylight to a room that was almost in darkness was more than Nishikori's myopic eyes could stand.

"Light!" he cried. "I demand light!"

Instantly a lantern blazed forth so brightly that it dazzled Nishikori.

But Doctor Shen Fu ignored the general's discomfiture, as he said, "Be seated. Here we can converse secure from interruption. The room is soundproof and below the level of the earth. In this hidden room it would be well for you not to be too arrogant. Here, I alone, am master. This shop has never been invaded by the Japanese, nor will it ever be. Rather would I turn it into a monstrous bomb that would annihilate Hangchow. Rest assured that in my warehouses are the ingredients and facilities for doing so. It is pleasant to mull over the extraordinary proposition that I could order your destruction, and dispose of your body by using an acid bath to eat it away, and no one would ever know what had become of so illustrious a general. However, I hesitate to do anything distressing to your person, since you have already said you have come as a customer. Only a fool turns away business. But what you buy, I repeat, must be paid for in rice—Japanese rice. I will deal with you on no other terms."

"I admire your spirit," said Nishikori, and there was surprisingly little bombast in his tone. "Of the situation you are now master. Naturally I agree to your terms. I am confronted by a curious perplexity and I have decided you are the one best fitted to solve it."

Not by as much as the flickering of an eyelid did Doctor Shen Fu acknowledge the compliment. His face was a grim mask in a play that was certainly not for children. But Nishikori, drilled in a military school of automatons, was unable to dis-

tinguish the signs of peril that were all about him, for they were written in water. So he went on speaking, "Our conquest of your country has gone on well. For the most part, we have met with little opposition."

"And so you were forced to drop poison gas and disease germ infected cotton on unprotected people so that plagues might break out. Relinquish your filthy untruths or I shall close my ears against your words, and if you leave this room alive it will only be by a miracle. Let us both speak bluntly. Your slogan is not 'Asia for the Asiatics' but Asia for the Japanese. Your war lords are vile! Proceed."

"That is an affront to the Bushido!"

"Here, let us put aside our heroic robes. My patience is wearing thin. If you have a purpose in your visit, expound it, otherwise I must turn to my own affairs. Like a frog in a well is a man of small thoughts."

At that moment General Nishikori had the feeling that he was wearing a hair shirt.

But to argue farther with this ancient doctor, who was without fear, was as futile as catching a fish and throwing away the net. So he continued speaking as though there had been no interruption.

"My visit to you is not concerned with war," he said in a honeyed tone. "I am here to help save lives, not to expend them. We have found, as we march peacefully through your vast cultivated river provinces, the farmers have an unpleasant habit of opening the dikes and spreading havoc among our soldiers. Recently, after we had taken the city of Hankow and were marching forward toward further conquests, the dikes of the river were suddenly opened and fifty-five thousand Japanese soldiers, carrying full pack, were drowned, while the Chinese lost three times that many, stamped into the earth by roaring floods to make fertilizer for next year's crops. What manner of people are the Chinese who would throw their own lives away in such stupid fashion?"

"Our men died that China might live. Perhaps the spirits of Confucius, Mencius and Lao Tzu walked among them to welcome them among the immortals. Our sages are great because they never look for ivory in a rat's teeth."

"Nevertheless, this problem of losing almost as many soldiers by drowning as are killed in battle is a serious problem that I have set myself to solve. Knowing that your Drug Shop is renowned throughout all the Eighteen Provinces, I lay my problem at your feet. I have heard that you are a hundred and fifty years old."

"Age is elastic. A boy with a sore foot is an old man. An ancient with firm step and good teeth is young. Some say I have drugs to cure all sicknesses, but alas I have none to cure China's present acute distress. Unless, unless—but I hesitate to express the knowledge that recently my eyes have given unto me as I walk through the countryside. Once more the *che* plant is growing in profusion in our farms and hillsides."

"The *che* plant, the *che* plant," repeated Nishikori. "What is that?"

"It is a plant of supernatural growth and auspicious omen. It is only to be found when virtuous leaders are leading our government. It augurs well for the future of Chiang Kai-shek."

"But China is beaten!" protested Nishikori. "She is on her knees!"

"Beaten? Beaten? What is the meaning of that word? We know it not in the Eighteen Provinces. But let us proceed. You have come to me for help because you are concerned over the loss by drowning of so many men."

MR. NISHIKORI smiled. Now they were on firmer ground. "Perhaps you can prepare an elixir for me so that my men will be able to live beneath the water,

to survive floods without undo fatigue. In short a drug that will bestow upon them the province of living under water indefinitely."

"An interesting proposition," said Doctor Shen Fu gently. "And I am glad that you have consulted me for my library is bulging with ancient manuscripts, some that have been recopied from bamboo books, on the 'lien tan', the drug of transmutation and of the powdered pearl medicine which is the concrete essence of the moon. Let me ponder over my manuscripts for a few days. I am sure that the results will be worth your trouble."

So General Nishikori departed and returned again in three days. Doctor Shen Fu greeted him in a manner that was almost affable.

"A book is only a man talking," he said, "and since your departure I have been listening to the voices of the ancients. But it was not until this early morning, that my efforts were rewarded. All through the night I loitered in my garden, entranced by the countless whispering voices about me. When the dawn crimsoned the sky with peony splendor, I drank the dew that had fallen from the magnolia trees, for I had solved the riddle that so perplexed you. I walked with padded footsteps into my mixing room. No one was about, no one was stirring. The accumulated mass of knowledge I had absorbed so hurriedly, became simplified. I worked fast and with sure hand. I mixed the ingredients well. The resultant pills are perhaps the most expensive to be found in all the world, and, for their purpose, the most powerful."

From his sleeve, he drew an elegant jade bottle with a legend in red grass characters upon it: "May Chiang Kai-shek have ten thousand lives." But Mr. Nishikori paid not the slightest attention to the inscription for he did not understand Chinese, but it wouldn't have mattered if he had been versed in the language of the Four Seas. So intent was he on his purpose, cold perspiration stood out upon his forehead in beads and even his narrow, close cropped head was damp. He took off his glasses and polished them carefully that he might the better see, for Doctor Shen Fu was pouring small vermilion pills into the palm of his hand. Nishikori liked the color. The doctor had staked much on its psychological effect.

"One pill and one pill only, that is all that is necessary," he explained. "Your men will find little difficulty swimming for sustained periods under water. Nor will the effects of the drug wear off, rather will the power of it intensify with each day that passes. My idea for this great boon to humanity was motivated by the writings of renowned Lieh Tzu who ages and ages ago conquered the laws of gravitation. Accounts of his adventures are written history for all who care to read."

While the doctor was speaking, General Nishikori gulped two of the pills, believing he was unobserved. Shen Fu smiled and the eyes of his heart grew merry but his face mirrored not his thoughts. Perhaps, ere long, the ghost of chaos would be halted and the ruined sky swept clean of enemy planes.

"The elixir has been delivered," he said. "Now your payment shall begin. Set out at various street intersections of the city, huge tubs of cooked rice that the poor may eat till their stomachs groan. My clerks will designate the positions where the tubs are to be placed and they will go along with you to see that instructions are carried out and to insure the good quality of the rice. It is fitting that I have put into those tiny pellets certain ingredients that, for want of a better word, I shall call harmonious elements. With discord they will evaporate as surely as the clouds are a dragon and the wind a tiger. The slightest chicanery might spoil the experiment."

General Nishikori was a man of action.

He lived by the sword and had little respect for words, nor did he know that many an unhappy culprit has been impaled on a sentence. He liked not the idea of wasting rice when so many of his own people, back in Japan, were starving; true it was only the peasant whose stomachs were being gnawed constantly by hunger. The Bushido and the war lords were well fed. The Emperor feasted well in his golden prison and wondered what evil was abroad in the land. But he was too weak to lift his hand to stem it if he had wanted to. Nishikori was more than half-tempted to destroy this vile doctor who had flaunted his power and insulted the Bushido, now that his use was at an end. But suppose the pills did not work, suppose the doctor had anticipated just such treachery and acted accordingly. What good would be a dead Shen Fu? Better keep him alive so that he could be tortured fittingly in the Japanese manner if the pills failed. But there was another factor also to be considered. The doctor, living, might be a safeguard for him if sickness or distress flittered about his person. With a sigh, Nishikori reluctantly agreed to put out the tubs of rice, reluctance that was seasoned with fear. He shuddered to think of what might happen if all the hungry were fed. Famine was the best Ally Japan had, next to disease. What a pity it was that the plague germs dropped from airplanes, in carefully prepared cotton batting, had not caused the anticipated havoc. Asia for the Asiatics but for the Chinese bubonic plague—the Imperial Japanese "New Order."

DURING the next few days, General Nishikori was much pleased with the effects of the drug. A few of his men had experimented. They had stayed under water for over an hour. The experiment had been conducted at West Lake not far from The New Hotel where Mr. Nishikori was living in luxurious quarters. So long did his men remain below water, he imagined they had been drowned and was about to return to his hotel for tiffin when they re-appeared, laughing and jabbering excitedly. The only casualty was that one of them had lost his glasses. The general was overjoyed. Now he was indeed the leader of an army of supermen, but there was one oddity that was of little importance. He himself, scarcely aware of his own actions, plunged into the lake, all clothed as he was, and swam about, all forgetful of the war and of the officers that were waiting to have tiffin with him at the hotel. When at last he came out of the lake he was jubilant though his uniform was a sorry spectacle and he looked as bedraggled as the lowliest soldier. But what matter, his head was in the clouds. Now indeed would he be a conqueror and his fame would go down in history among the greatest warriors the world has ever known. Perhaps it would be better to kill Shen Fu after all so that no other person might learn this amazing secret.

Back at the hotel, after he had bathed and put on dry clothes, he swallowed two more pills before joining the officers who were waiting for him. The doctor had said that one pellet was sufficient; sufficient, perhaps, for a private soldier but he was a noble general, a member of the Bushido and his father had been an aristocrat with special privileges.

Late that evening, when he had been able to shake off the leech-like petty officers, he returned to West Lake, cast off his clothes and plunged into the cool refreshing water. His throat had felt parched. Though the day had been cool, he had suffered intensely. There must have been much humidity in the air. Another thing that troubled him was that red marks had appeared on either side of his throat just below the ears, odd straight marks, half as long as his thumb. They looked like old knife wounds that had only recently healed.

He had an unaccountable feeling, a wish that they would break open. Then it would not be so difficult to breathe. But now as he glided through the waters of West Lake, among the lotuses, all was right once more. No longer was it difficult to breathe. The night was full of spring even though it was early autumn. A yellow moon hung low in the sky, or was it "the Rising Sun of Japan" glistening on the wide domains it would soon encompass. He laughed gutterally. Some day Japan would control the world.

General Nishikori remained in the water until the first silver fingers of morning lifted to gently push aside the veil of night. Then with great reluctance, he came ashore, put on his clothes and became an important personage once more, the commandant of all the armies in Chekiang Province. However, he could not refrain from casting a glance over his shoulder at the enticing water of the lake. Never had he passed so glorious a night. Nor was he aware that after ten long desolate years of constant defeat, the scales of fortune were tipping slowly in China's favor. In Szechwan and Hunan Provinces especially, old China, revitalized by supplies from the Allied Nations was slowly pushing back her enemies, topped by an especially brilliant victory at Changsha. Once more the tea of the Middle Kingdom was fragrant, free of its bitter, bitter taste.

GENERAL NISHIKORI walked about as though in a dream, little concerned with what was happening about him. He even ceased to deplore the necessity of putting out tubs of rice for the poor in accordance with the directions of Dr. Shen Fu. His officers tended to this for him, obeying like automatons. The red marks at the sides of his neck caused him almost constant discomfiture. Occasionally they bled slightly.

Every day he stopped at the Drug Shop of a Thousand Years to talk with the learned doctor.

He asked the doctor to examine the marks on his neck.

Shen Fu smiled as he gazed upon them. "You have nothing to worry about," he said.

"Strangely enough some of the officers of my staff are similarly marked."

"You are blood brothers. It is a good omen." He did not bother adding, that he meant a good omen for China. After a moment, he continued, "When the flesh separates, you will be able to swim even better."

Nishikori was little perturbed at the prospect, on the contrary he seemed well satisfied. He walked out into the garden to the large artificial fish pond. The water was like clear turquoise. The gold fish reflected the sun. How clear and cool the water was with here and there a pond lily or a lotus.

His throat was dry. Slowly he walked around the pool, gazing at the shimmering fish. He was so fascinated, that hours passed without his knowledge.

Meanwhile his men were acting in a peculiar fashion. All seemed keenly elated. They cast aside their guns, their interest in war had evaporated. Many of their necks were bleeding slightly from small slits below the ears. As though they were fleeing from a plague infested city, they rushed down to the river's edge. Some were running. But it was a joyous rout, many were laughing. A few tried to sing but their throats were too dry for that. And in their wake, walked many of the people of Hangchow, uninterested in their actions, but still bent on one of the great occasions of the year, to watch the Hangchow Bore at the autumnal equinox, that strangest and most startling phenomenon of nature along the entire Asiatic coast.

The estuary at the mouth of the Ch'ien T'ang River from Yangtze Cape on the

North to the opposite point of land on the South is about sixty-five miles in width. And from the Yangtze Cape to where the Bore begins to form is about eighty miles. Throughout this distance the estuary narrows down to about eight miles, producing a broad funnel shaped channel. The roar of the tidal wave can be heard for forty-five minutes before it comes into view. Instead of the banks of this channel being straight and regular, they are very crooked, the right or Southern bank being pushed in upon the land a great distance. This concavity of the channel bank deflects the tidal currents, throwing them against the river currents which together with the piling up of the water as it crowds into the apex of this funnel-shaped channel produces the phenomenon known as the Bore.

On this particular occasion thousands of Chinese, quiet and orderly, were crowding the great stone embankment, throngs which permitted the free movement of the Japanese troops who ran pell mell down the dikes to await the coming Bore. Many, over-zealous, sprang into the river and swam toward the onrushing flood. But none of them spoke, none of them said anything, nor did they utter a sound though their lips moved. It was the supreme hour of their existence. On, on they came like beetles, swarming over one another, forcing the front ranks into the water, but none cared. The cool water closed over them willingly.

Onward the monstruous wave plunged as an ancient poet has written, "muttering, hurrying, seething and surging; confused and troubled, vast, unbridled, immensely deep and wide, a chaos unlimited; it hopes to seize the southern hills, it reaches up to the azure sky, confident it will leap over the steep banks." The poet wrote long before Ch'ien Ch'iu built the first dike walls in A.D. 910. Since that time many superb engineers have added to this great work, so that now the thousands of Chinese spectators were enabled to stand at the summit of the dikes and watch the water carnival with considerable safety. They ate cumquats, mellon seeds and dried almonds. The children chanted verses and laughter was plentiful. But the elders were silent. The few venturesome river boats were tied fast to the shore, but the water lifted them so high that they strained at their chains and ropes. They rocked madly at the impact of the water which rose to a height of twenty-five feet, carrying all the Japanese soldiers along with it. Certainly, for the Chinese it was a time for eating cumquats. Within forty-five minutes, the flood subsided but the invading soldiers returned no more to Hangchow, preferring to go out to sea on the ebb tide, but none were drowned, all were content. Doctor Shen Fu's experiment had been eminently successful. Truly he had created Thousand Blessings Pills. But he was unable to visit the ramparts of the river, it would not have been in good taste, for he still had a guest in his establishment. In the lotus pond General Nishikori was swimming around joyously. The fish were amazed.

Lost Vacation

By MINDRET LORD

IN NO sense is this a ghost story. It is a fact that I failed to see in the mirror the image that must have been there, but that proves nothing. It seems possible that I had become the victim of some sort of self-hypnosis, though against such a theory is the argument that there was no gap in my memory. I remember all of the circumstances with perfect clarity and in complete detail. Perhaps, instead,

Mortals live in terror of seeing apparitions, but sometimes it is more fearsome to see . . . nothing.

the shock, and the impotent anger of that last ridiculous scene had made me slightly hysterical, so that when I passed the long mirror on the wall, I saw only what I feared and expected to see—nothing. But whatever may be the true explanation, there was no ghost, nor could there have been one in the ordinary meaning of the term.

I was wet, cold, scratched and bruised. I had no idea how far I would have to wander along the desolate rocky coast to find shelter from the storm that was blowing in from the Pacific. My boat was lost, together with all my equipment, save only my small camera and a pair of binoculars. A fine end to what had been intended as a delightful exploratory holiday!

My first sight of the cottage was surprising and more than welcome: a neat, low, white building set among grotesquely twisted cypresses, miles from the nearest house or village. It was the sort of place that a retired sea captain might build—immaculate and lonely on a spear-shaped cliff that thrust out to the ocean like the prow of a ship. The cold March wind whipped at my wet clothing as I approached the house along a narrow gravel path lined with shells. The front door had a barred window in it behind which I thought I saw a vague blur of white, as if someone were staring out. However, the illusion vanished before I reached the threshold.

I knocked and waited. There was no sound inside. The wind had gained new fury and the crash of the waves on the rocks below was thunderous. Even here, in the lee of the house, the fine spray dashed like rain. I knocked again, louder this time. After a moment a face appeared at the window—the same, I felt sure, that had watched me as I came up the path.

It was a woman's face. Though I could see her very indistinctly through the bars and glass, there could be no doubt that she was extraordinarily beautiful. It was a delicately sculptured heart-shaped face, framed in loosely flowing hair of glossy black. Her small nose was charmingly tilted, her mouth was generously curved and good-humored. But her eyes I remember best—very dark, very shining eyes that looked at me without recognition or expression of any kind. Their unfocused gaze wandered over me and the rest of the world outside the door while I waited for her to ask me what I wanted. Finally she leaned closer to the window and glanced up at the threatening sky. I shouted above the wind, "Madam, I wonder if you could tell me where I—" Without making the slightest sign that she either saw or heard me, she turned and started away from the door.

THIS, it seemed to me was worse than poor hospitality, it was downright inhumanity. I pounded on the door with my fist and saw her hesitate uncertainly. "Madam!" I shouted. "Will you please come back here and answer a civil question?" Slowly, and not as if in response to my demand, she returned, opened the door and stood looking out, not at me, but through and beyond me.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I've had a little accident and I would very greatly appreciate it if—"

Her deep, rather throaty, but very attractive voice interrupted me: "That's strange—I was quite sure I heard a knock. The wind, probably."

It occurred to me that she was blind, though her eyes certainly did not look sightless. "I knocked," I said. "That's what you heard. I'm right here—in front of you. I—"

She shook her head and murmured, "But it did sound just as if somebody were . . ." Leaving the sentence unfinished, she moved back against the open door and stood quietly.

I thought, of course, that the poor girl

was deaf as she was blind and that probably her gesture of standing aside in the doorway was not intended as an invitation. However, I was in no mood to question the matter. Whether or not I was taking advantage of her blindness, I entered the house. She closed the door behind me and followed me into the living room.

It was a warm, cheerful room with a log fire blazing on the hearth. The furniture was comfortable and gayly upholstered in flowered chintz. A long, gold-framed mirror over the fireplace reflected a setting that was wholly delightful—a perfect background for the beauty of my unaware hostess. As I glanced at myself, though, I realized what a contrast it was to my own remarkable appearance. I looked as if I belonged at the bottom of a mine; I was covered with grime and scratches from the rocks over which I had scrambled, my clothes were torn and bedraggled, my hair tangled. I thought: If she could have seen me, I'd still be outside. The reflection in the glass was of a tired young giant who had been in a drunken brawl.

My hostess joined me—or rather she passed me without a glance and curled up in the chair beside the fire. She did not walk with the indecision of the blind and when she had settled herself comfortably, she picked up a book and began to read!

I was too exhausted, too hungry and cold to be very startled. I looked at her, relaxed and perfectly at ease in the big wing chair — completely alone with her book. She was, certainly, one of the most beautiful women I had ever seen. If she could see, why had she pretended not to see me? But for the moment, that question was not nearly so important as two others: When do I eat? and, Where do I go from here?

I cleared my throat. I coughed. She did not look up. At last, I said, "Of course, I'm terribly sorry to intrude like this—but if you could just spare me a minute of your time, it might be easier for both of us. I am not a tramp. I am not going to harm you in any way." (This sounded absurd as I said it.) "My name is Robert Strand. I am an ornithologist—that is to say, I'm interested in birds. I came to this God-forsaken coast because there are some nesting colonies of the Tufted Puffin —a species I'm making a particular study of." She turned a page and went on reading. I continued doggedly. "This morning I tore out the bottom of my boat and lost it, which explains why I'm here and in this condition. I should be extremely grateful for any help—for little food—for some dry clothing, if possible. Or, if you are too busy, if you would be kind enough to direct me to the nearest place where—" Both my plea and my sarcasm were lost on her. I might have been talking to the wall. The rising gale made a hollow moaning in the chimney; she looked up from her book and said to herself, softly, "Listen to the wind!"

Added to my discomfort, I was beginning to feel ridiculous. I wanted to take her by the shoulders, shake her, and say, "Look here! I've stood enough! Now you're going to pay some attention whether you like it or not!" Instead, I counted ten. I counted ten several times and at about forty-seven, I said, "Very well. But I'm not going out in that storm. If you had treated me with common decency, I might be gone by now. But if you insist upon ignoring me, I shall act just as if you were as kind and generous as you are beautiful." At that, I thought I saw her eyelids flicker and for an instant I hoped that flattery would succeed in gaining her attention. But still she did not lift her gaze. "So, if I must provide for myself, I shall begin in the kitchen."

I left the room expecting her to call me back or follow me. Just outside, I paused. I heard her sigh and turn a page.

The kitchen was well stocked with excellent food to which I helped myself plentifully. While I was still stuffing myself the storm broke; it was pitch black outside and the rain beat savagely against the roof and windows. Surely there could be no question of leaving the house on this wild night. I might even refuse to go.

When I returned to the living room I found she had fallen asleep over her book —and a lovely picture she made in the wavering glow of the fire, her feet tucked under her like a child, her head resting half hidden in the deep wing of the chair. Her hands were folded on the open book in her lap and I noticed that she wore no rings. I watched her soft breathing while the red reflections of the fire played on her hair. *La belle dame sans merci.* Very beautiful—and very annoying. Noisily I flung another log onto the blaze and sat down opposite her. But she did not wake and presently I, too, began to realize that I could not keep my eyes open. I was aching with fatigue, but at last I was warm, fed and practically unconscious. With tremendous effort I got up and staggered over to the couch.

ONCE during the night I had the impression that a light was being held not far from my face. However, I rolled over without opening my eyes, so I cannot be sure.

I woke shortly after dawn, entirely unconfused. I knew where I was and how I came to be there. The logs in the fireplace had burnt to ashes. The wing chair was empty. The storm had passed, leaving the air clear and fresh. As I got up and stretched I saw myself in the mirror; I bore not the faintest resemblance to a fashion plate, I was beginning to need a shave pretty badly, but at least I was no longer frightening.

I think it happens occasionally to everyone that an apparently difficult problem will be solved in sleep. One goes to bed worrying over some obstinate question and wakes with the answer, without knowing what processes of reasoning went into the solution. So it was with me. It was perfectly simple—my hostess was an actress on vacation, or a writer, or an artist of some sort to whom absolute privacy was a matter of first importance. She could not refuse me shelter, but by ignoring my presence, by denying my very existence, she could maintain at least the form of her precious solitude. What you do not admit is there, is not there. I had only admiration for her strength of mind and purpose. None the less, I intended to abuse her curious hospitality a little further; I was hungry.

On the way to the kitchen I halted at the open doorway to the bedroom. Surely this was carrying the fiction of being alone in the house to unnecessary lengths! On the wide bed she lay sleeping like a princess in a fairy tale, her hair streaming over the pillow, one bare arm over her head, the other at her side. For no better reason than that she was so lovely to look at, I stole into the room and stood beside the bed.

Suddenly, still sleeping, she flung out her hand. I did not step back in time to avoid her and her hand struck my wrist which she instantly grasped. Her eyes flew open, she gave a startled gasp, but she did not seem at all terrified. Holding my wrist, she sat up and put her other hand on my arm.

"George!" she said. "It *is* you, isn't it, George?"

"I'm afraid not," I started to explain. "The fact is—"

"You said you'd come back, darling—and I knew you would." Delicately her hands started exploring my arm. "George —George—George . . . darling!" She pulled me toward her and I sat down on the edge of the bed. "Dearest—I can

feel you—and I know it's you—it couldn't be anybody else, could it—but can't you make me see you—or hear you?" She put her hand on my cheek. "You need a shave, darling. Don't they have razors over there?" She laughed. "But I don't care. You can grow a beard if you want to. Oh dearest, I'm so happy!" She gazed ecstatically in my general direction and repeated, "I knew you'd come! That's why I stayed here—I knew you'd come if you could. . . . Dearest, aren't you going to kiss me—after all this time?" I kissed her. After awhile, she said, "If I could only hear your voice, dear. Please try—say my name—say, 'Lya,' right in my ear, and I'll hear you."

I said, "Lya," right in her ear and she did not hear me, but my whiskers brushed her cheek and she shivered and laughed deliciously.

IT WAS ideal. The house was near enough to the colony of Tufted Puffins so that I could study them by day—and take innumerable photographs which, incidentally, contributed a good deal to the later success of my monograph on the birds. Then, with evening, when the light failed, I would come home to Lya.

Being apparently unable to see or hear me, Lya assumed that when I did not actually touch her, I was not present. This arrangement had no disadvantages, whatever. Fictitious or not, each of us enjoyed as much of solitude and privacy as we desired, together with a rare sort of companionship. After dinner, for instance, we would settle down at opposite sides of the hearth; Lya might be sewing, or reading, or merely gazing into the fire, while I launched into a technical discussion of the Tufted Puffin that would probably have bored any listening woman to death. Occasionally, on the chance that I might be present, she would glance up and smile encouragingly.

The Tufted Puffin is a curious bird in many respects. In appearance he is as comic as a Halloween mask. On a conservative black body is mounted a head that is one of nature's practical jokes. A broad white band spreads across the rather flat face, out of which protrudes a tremendous beak of bright vermilion—an apoplectic beak that changes color at the base to an oily green. The rather large, ingenuous white eyes are rimmed with the same brilliant red, giving the bird a studious, bespectacled look. As if this were not enough, in the summer they grow long tufts of straw-yellow feathers on each side of their silly heads. The feathers part on the brow and hang down around their eyes like an old-fashioned haircut.

For a nest, the Puffin usually burrows into the side of a cliff, sometimes to a distance of five feet. At the end of the tunnel a single egg is laid on a carpet of grass—and, by the way, a good thing not to do is to try to rob a Puffin's nest. Whichever parent is at home will pop up at the entrance and give a painful demonstration of what that ridiculous beak was intended for. A butcher's cleaver could hardly be more effective.

I talked to Lya at great length on the subject of Puffins, Murres, Gulls, Guillemots, Cormorants and various other aquatic birds that were my present interest.

I also indulged in monologues on my tastes, experiences and opinions. It was much better than talking to myself and vastly better than arguing each point.

Lya talked to me only at those times when we were in some sort of physical contact—when I held her hand, when we sat together, or walked arm in arm along the cliff. When she could not touch me, she could not be sure that I was there and she said it made her feel foolish to talk to empty air.

It was fantastically perfect.

BUT perfection was not enough for me. My vanity—my senseless ego—rode me like a jockey. There was a challenge here that I must meet and conquer—a challenge to me, to what I stood for, to what I looked like, to my integrity, to my personality—and so on. All that nonsense, and more. I would rather have hell as Robert Strand, than heaven as George. What it amounted to was that I had to prove something.

I was delivering one of my interminable monologues on Puffins when I made my first idiotic break. It came as more or less of a surprise to me, but having made the break, my jockey goaded me on toward the finish line. I had remarked that in ancient times the Puffin was hunted over much of its European range and salted down in large quantities to be eaten during Lent. Of course the creature wasn't exactly fish, but it tasted enough like fish to satisfy the consciences and the stomachs of the devout. "I suppose," I said, they would have denied it was a bird, at all. The fact that it flies could be discounted—some fish do fly. No, it was merely a fish with feathers instead of scales. . . . People don't believe their own eyes. They believe only what is convenient—only what they wish to believe." Then, like the stupid young ass that I was, unwilling to let my profound observation echo away into the oblivion it deserved, I added: "Like you."

Lya did not raise her head and as usual, seemed not to have heard. Intentionally or not, I had said it—and having said it, I would not retreat. Not I. If what I had said was not enough, there were more words, and more ways to say them. I went to the desk and wrote in bold letters:

YOU CAN SEE AND HEAR ME PERFECTLY. WHY DON'T YOU ADMIT IT? AND STOP CALLING ME GEORGE!

I took the note and laid it on her lap. She looked at it expressionlessly, reversed it to see its other side, then turned it over again, and upside down. "George?" she asked. "What is it? Is there something you want to tell me?"

"Read it!" I demanded. "Read it and stop this childish business!"

She shook her head as if she were deeply puzzled and twisted the note sideways. "I'm sorry, George—I don't understand. Why would you give me a blank paper?"

"The paper is not blank!" I yelled. "Here! Wait a minute!"

I slapped another sheet of paper onto her lap, placed a pencil between her fingers and taking her hand in mine, forced her to write:

I ADMIT I CAN—

THAT was as far as the confession got. She struggled away from me, crying, "You're rough, George! I don't like you that way!" She ran out of the room and slammed her door. I heard the key turn in the lock.

I spent that night on the couch, cursing myself for a fool.

At breakfast I proposed to her. "Darling," I said, "if this game amuses you, I'm willing to play it your way. In fact, I'm willing to play it forever." There was no answer. I took her in my arms. "Marry me, Lya—I adore you."

She turned up her face to be kissed and murmured, "George, darling."

That was a black day for me. The hours I spent at the Puffin colony were wasted; I watched them in their ornate domesticity with sour, incurious eyes. What were their problems to me? But my dilemma was perverse and unnatural—even, possibly, *super*natural. I was in such a stew that I began to consider the possibility that Lya was not merely being whimsical, but that in some mysterious fashion I

but that in some mysterious fashion I really had become invisible and inaudible. I had met nobody but Lya since the beginning. Suppose others might fail to see or hear me! At sunset I started back to the cottage in a panic.

I opened the front door and strode in, resolved to settle the question once for all. This time there would be no evasions and no pity—not if it meant the end! I had my own sanity to think of, and this thing was driving me— On the bench in the hall lay a man's hat and topcoat—not mine.

So! George, probably. George—home at last—and more than a little late. Whoever he might be, and whether or not he belonged here, I proposed to throw him out on his neck. Lya was mine, now—and I was tired of being made a monkey.

In a raging temper I stamped through the house calling Lya's name. The house was empty. Apparently they had gone out together. Very well, I would wait for them. I paced the living room floor deciding what I would say, the very words I would use. Lya would stop her nonsense and marry me—immediately! And as for George, George could leave in peace, or he could leave with a broken jaw. It was all one to me.

I passed the mirror over the fireplace as I marched up and down, and each time I went by I was distantly, vaguely aware that something was missing. At last it came sharply into my mind. I stopped and stared. I came close up to the mirror. Thinking it must be some trick of the light, I moved from side to side. The room was clearly reflected, but I was nowhere. There was not a sign of me. Nothing.

I rushed outside and started to run. When I could run no longer, I walked until I could run again.

The next morning I came to a small town. At the first drug store I went in and sat at the counter. My face was in the mirror across the bar. I looked worn out and scared, but recognizable and solid enough. Over his shoulder the counterman asked, "What'll it be?"

I said, "Turn around here, and look at me."

"Okay. Had a night of it, huh?"

"Can you see me?"

"Why, sure."

"And you can hear me all right?"

"Sure. I ain't deef. What's-a gag?"

"No gag," I said. "Just give me a cup of coffee."

I found I had lost track of the days. My vacation had ended and I was nearly a week overdue at the university.

Most nights I dreamed about Lya and during my waking hours I thought about her constantly. Although I tried to rationalize my experience, I finally realized that it was becoming a rather dangerous obsession. When my next holiday arrived, three months later, I returned to the cottage.

I found a painter, his wife and several children living in the place. They had moved in a week or so before, having rented it, they said, from the owner, a young woman who was living there at the time they found it. She was a Mrs. George Tomlinson, a widow, they believed. I said I was an old friend of Mrs. Tomlinson and asked for her address, but they could not give it to me. They dealt with her through an agent.

I went to the agent who said he was sorry but he was under strict orders not to reveal his client's whereabouts. He would, however, forward a note.

I wrote, passionately and at length. The letter was returned, unopened.

It is a curious fact that although I have literally hundreds of excellent photographs of the Tufted Puffin, I never thought to take a picture of Lya.

Damn the Tufted Puffin!

Colleagues

By SYLVIA LEONE MAHLER

Death is a doctor . . .

"YOU'D ought to let me call a doctor."

The landlady fussed with the torn pocket of her pink apron as she glanced reproachfully through the open door of room sixteen at the old man sitting doubled over on the edge of his bed, his dark gray suit rumpled, one hand pressed to his chest.

He did not even look up. He just shook his head—vehemently at first, then gingerly, as the advancing bayonet of pain touched his heart.

"Told you *no*—Mrs. Preuss," he gasped, when he could speak, spacing his words with breath. "Told you—had these spells before. Got over 'em. Wasn't doctor—fifty years for—nothing. Care of myself."

He glanced up, under bushy white brows, at the square oak table beside the bed, where two or three bottles and a glass of water crowned the tobacco-peppered litter of papers, books, a magnifying glass, his pipe. "Got medicine. Matter of rest. Day'r two."

"But you've been sitting like this sence early morning, Doctor Hamilton. You jus' don't realize. After all, you ain't as young as you was, and you living here I'm in a way responsible. Doctor Brent down street could just run up and look *in*. That wouldn't hurt none—or cost you nothing."

The old man's faded blue eyes rolled

"A hand lifted his wrist—"

up to meet the impatient concern in her close-set brown ones with all the determination his enfeebled presence could not impress upon her.

"Call in that old fool—any old fool—I'll pack my things, sick's I am. Find place I'm let alone—have privacy—little peace."

Mrs. Preuss's face reddened. "I only spoke for your good. You're a stranger here, there's no one to look after you. If you'd even get into *bed*—"

Old Doctor Hamilton hitched his way carefully along the edge of the rumpled red-and-white quilt, in the direction of the table that held his medicine— Bombs abroad, mangling thousands, and she stood there clucking over his old bones—

"Can't I at least *reach* it to you?" It was the dying-away of her insistence.

But he was past argument. He only motioned with his free hand: *out—out*—and remained where he was, his eyes on the floor, till she had gone. If it were colder, he'd have had his door locked this morning; but in this stifling weather—He'd acted like an obstinate old coot, of course, but there was no other means of discouraging her officious kind. The thing was, once one got into bed, it was too easy to surrender—

How long it was that he sat there after she had stumped away defeated, how long it was before he summoned the will to edge along his bed, the rest of the little distance to the table, was a vague matter. But it was certain that he reached it, and swallowed the capsules, as he intended. He knew that because of the ease that finally began to envelop him, that permitted him to remove his shoes and lie down on the quilt; because of the pleasure he felt when he saw that little brat, Mary Conti, from the top floor back, standing by the side of his bed—with a white kernel or two missing from her small smile—and holding out a bunch of green stuff. As if he were a cow—

"This smells nice, Doctor Hamilton! I picked it for you from the tree in the yard, at school."

"Pine, eh?" The doctor clutched the prickly little bouquet and raised it slowly to his nose. "Smells—fresh. Up in the pines." He sighed a jerky sigh; a rodent gnawing had begun in his chest. "Nice—hot day like this."

THE child looked at Doctor Hamilton with calm black eyes. " 'Tis n't hot. I've got my sweater on. You don't *look* hot, either—your face ain't red enough. You look cold. What's the matter with you?"

His sudden scowl took her aback for a moment, but then she spoke with mature reproach: "You should be polite to the visiting nurse."

His eyebrows humped up like white caterpillars. "Nurse!" His bluish lips twisted, unmirthfully.

Staring at him she had a better idea. "No," she contradicted herself, "I'm not the nurse. I'm your mother, and you're my baby. My little blue baby. Francesca was one." Immediately, she was all energy. "Now, baby, I must keep you very warm."

A hot-water bottle, in which comfort had died, lay on the rug; she pounced upon it and thrust it under his feet. She pulled up the folded white spread from the foot of the bed and tucked it under his chin. That done, her eyes darted over the untidy table at her elbow, rested cannily upon the bottles. "Is that medicine?"

The old man raised his arm and began to strain his head from the pillow. "I must take—my capsules."

"Pills," the child corrected him. "I'll get 'em." She shook the bottle, pleased. "Isn't this fun? Mamma don't know I'm down here."

"Two," the doctor said, raising himself with difficulty on one elbow as she uncapped the bottle and poured some pellets

into his cupped hand. "Just two." He selected them himself, and put the rest back, spilling a few on the floor. She held the glass of water to his lips.

"Now go to sleep!" she commanded tenderly, as he sighed and fell flat on the pillow, and she tucked the spread around his neck once more and stroked down his eyelids with little, dirty fingers. Then she carried a chair up to the bedside, placed it noiselessly, and sat down, her forefinger at her lips.

"Hush, everybody!" she cautioned, looking severely around the room. "Evelyn! Joseph!" Her fingers flew, with imaginary crochet.

The doctor was a queer-looking baby, sleeping. He was sound asleep now, too—snoring. After a sufficient period of watching him with proper maternal solicitude, she got up and wandered about the bedroom, handled the toilet articles on top of the oak dresser, combed her black hair with the doctor's black comb, and finally, spying a plaid handkerchief in the top drawer that suggested itself as an admirable apron for her doll, she slipped out of the room without a backward glance.

However unbabylike the old man might look, he had a wonderful sleep. He did not awaken until the room was growing dark, and only then because a hand lifted his wrist, and fingers pressed his pulse. For a moment he thought one of his old d.t. patients had risen from delirium to grapple with him, and he sat up in the bed, wildly. Then his eyes took in the young man who was sitting in the chair by the bedside, laughing, showing even white teeth. His hair was dark, even in the shadows; his eyes were dark and lively. Who? Then Doctor Hamilton saw the black bag on the floor.

"Oh, Lord!" he exclaimed. "So Meddle Mattie did it, after all! But at least you're not the old sour-puss down the street. You've come too late, though. Don't need you. This attack was a heller, I'll admit, but I'm over it. I took my own prescription." He nodded his head toward the bottles on the table. "Two one and one-half grain—"

"Yes, I found the formula in your papers. It's powerful stuff, and you evidently took a stiff dose, too. It got you out of the pickle quicker than I'd have expected."

He applied his stethoscope, while the old man lay quiet. He listened, nodded in satisfaction, put the instrument back in the case at his feet, and rising, set the chair back against the wall.

"Your heart's quite as it should be, now. How do you feel?"

Doctor Hamilton stretched himself where he lay and exhaled evenly, deeply.

"Pain?"

"No pain." He sat up, swung his legs over the edge of the bed, and felt for his shoes.

"There's nothing to get up for," protested the young doctor. "It's just as well for you to stay quiet for awhile."

"Less time I spend flat on my back, the better I like it. Besides, I feel pretty much all gone. Haven't eaten since—why, since yesterday noon." He looked up hesitantly at the tall young man before he bent down to tie his shoe laces. "Perhaps, if I take it slowly—go down with you—I can manage getting down to the dairy lunch for a little snack."

"How about dining with me? It would be a pleasure to have you, Doctor." He glanced about for the electric light switch, located it by the door, and snapped it on.

THE old man's face was eager in the light. He got up a trifle weakly, then looked dubiously from the other's well-pressed dark clothes to his own creased suit. "I'll have to change—" He began to pull at his tie.

"No, don't bother," said the young physician quickly. "We can dine at my

apartment. I expect no visitors tonight. We'll be quite alone, and you can relax all you please. You'd better slip on a topcoat, though—it's getting cold, out."

While Doctor Hamilton brushed his thin white hair and attacked his clothes with a shabby whisk broom, his new acquaintance strolled over to the collection of medical books on the shelves between the two small windows and stooped to examine the titles.

"I see from your library," he observed, as the old man went to the clothes closet, "that you're interested in the non-filterable viruses. We should have some good talk tonight. I've done considerable research in polio, myself."

"That so?" Doctor Hamilton replied from within the closet. "By the way, sir," he reminded him, "you didn't tell me your name." The heavy overcoat fell from the hangar as he reached for it, and stooping to retrieve it, a little dizzily, he missed the younger man's reply.

". . . make your acquaintance sooner," he was saying, when Doctor Hamilton emerged. He stepped forward quickly. "Let me help you with the coat."

The old doctor hated to ask twice. His host had a definite air of assurance about him. Certainly, young as he was, he was no neophyte. He tried a roundabout way: "Your apartment is in this neighborhood?"

"No, it's quite a bit out of town. But the ride will rest you." He stood aside to let Doctor Hamilton precede him through the door.

The landlady was standing at the far end of the hall, at the head of the stairs to the first floor, her arms rolled up in her apron. She looked up as the two physicians approached and stared coldly.

"Goodnight, Mrs. Preuss," said the old man courteously. "I really did not need the services of a—colleague—as you see. But it seems that I've found a friend, and I thank you."

The woman accepted his apology most ungraciously. It was apparent to the doctor that she had decided to get even with him for his discourtesy of the morning when she turned her back on him without a word and went to the open window, where a pair of thin net curtains were sucking in and out over the sill in the cold evening breeze. Unwrapping her arms from the apron, she lowered the sash and stood looking down sullenly upon the street.

"You'd think she'd at least be civil," the doctor murmured, considerably nonplussed, as the two men set foot on the carpeted stairs, "when she was so concerned as to call you in."

"As a matter of fact, she didn't. I was called to a patient upstairs—a false alarm, as it happened—and I was on my way down when a little girl sneaked out of your room, looking very guilty about something. When she passed me, she said, "I didn't either, steal it! Doctor Hamilton gave it to me!" Naturally, I was curious, so I just looked in as I went by."

The old man was a little puzzled. "I don't remember giving the child anything. But no matter. You've explained the dirty look Mrs. Preuss gave me when I came along, hobnobbing with a strange medico. I knew my rent was paid up!"

His companion laughed, too, and pressed his arm. They reached the landing and turned into the main flight just as the street door opened below and an elderly, florid man, carrying a satchel, came hurrying in and began to mount the steps.

"Well, there's old Brent, the drug store ignoramus!" snorted Doctor Hamilton softly. "You know him?" he whispered, surprised, as the young man bowed at the ascending newcomer.

"I run across him here and there. 'Evening, Brent!"

Doctor Brent eyed them with complete indifference and muttered something grouchily under his breath as they came

abreast, leaving them barely room enough to pass.

"Affable fellow!" the old doctor commented dryly, as they pushed open the outer door and stepped onto the cold cement porch. "But then, he was pretty much winded. Must be an urgent case, to make *him* hurry."

"I'd say his own case was the urgent one," his new friend said, looking up and down the narrow, half-empty street, as if for a cab. "You heard him breathe? It wouldn't surprise me if he were to join us within six or eight—but here's the car."

HE STEERED Doctor Hamilton by the elbow down the steps and through the thin file of passers-by toward the curbing, where a streamlined black and silver motor had just drawn up.

The old man scarcely noticed it; he was gazing up at the clear-cut profile of his host. "Join us?" he repeated in a perplexed tone. "You like the fellow, then?"

"I didn't mean to imply that. He's turned a good many of his cases over to me, but I never was partial to the man."

The driver, in neat gray uniform, had sprung out, and now he opened the car door for them.

"Lucky, to pick up a cab around here," the old doctor said, as he ducked his head and climbed in. "This one's new to me, too. Never saw one in town before, to my knowledge. Or *is* this a taxi?"

"No, it's my own car." The young physician put down his bag with a sigh of relief.

The driver slammed the door upon them and slid behind the wheel.

Practicing in this part of town? With a chauffeur, and a car like this? Doctor Hamilton began to feel decidedly confused. He must get this straight. "By the way, Doctor," he murmured, very diffidently, for him, "I didn't catch your name, upstairs."

"I beg your pardon!" apologized his companion. "I thought you knew—"

"Where to, sir?" asked the driver, without turning around.

"Home. Straight home." Leaning back comfortably in his corner, Death looked at old Doctor Hamilton and smiled.

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YOURS TRULY—JACK THE RIPPER

● **By ROBERT BLOCH** ●

HIS LAST APPEARANCE

By
H. Bedford-Jones

IT was just a bare coral reef in mid-Pacific but they told some darn funny stories about the place. And some scientist had claimed that a reef like Coral Territory in the middle of the ocean was an ideal place for occult manifestations. When the last smoke of war has been blown clear from the Pacific, who knows what ghosts will haunt the islands whose shores at last are free?

The man without a face had come to—

THE STREET OF FACES

HERE dwelled a famed mechanic in human flesh, a Chinese doctor who had never lost a patient, and one whose ancestors had never lost a patient.

To this man came the treacherous Japanese general, the man without a face, and an oppressor of China . . . but, nevertheless a patient.

A story of strange courage and of a sublime revenge.

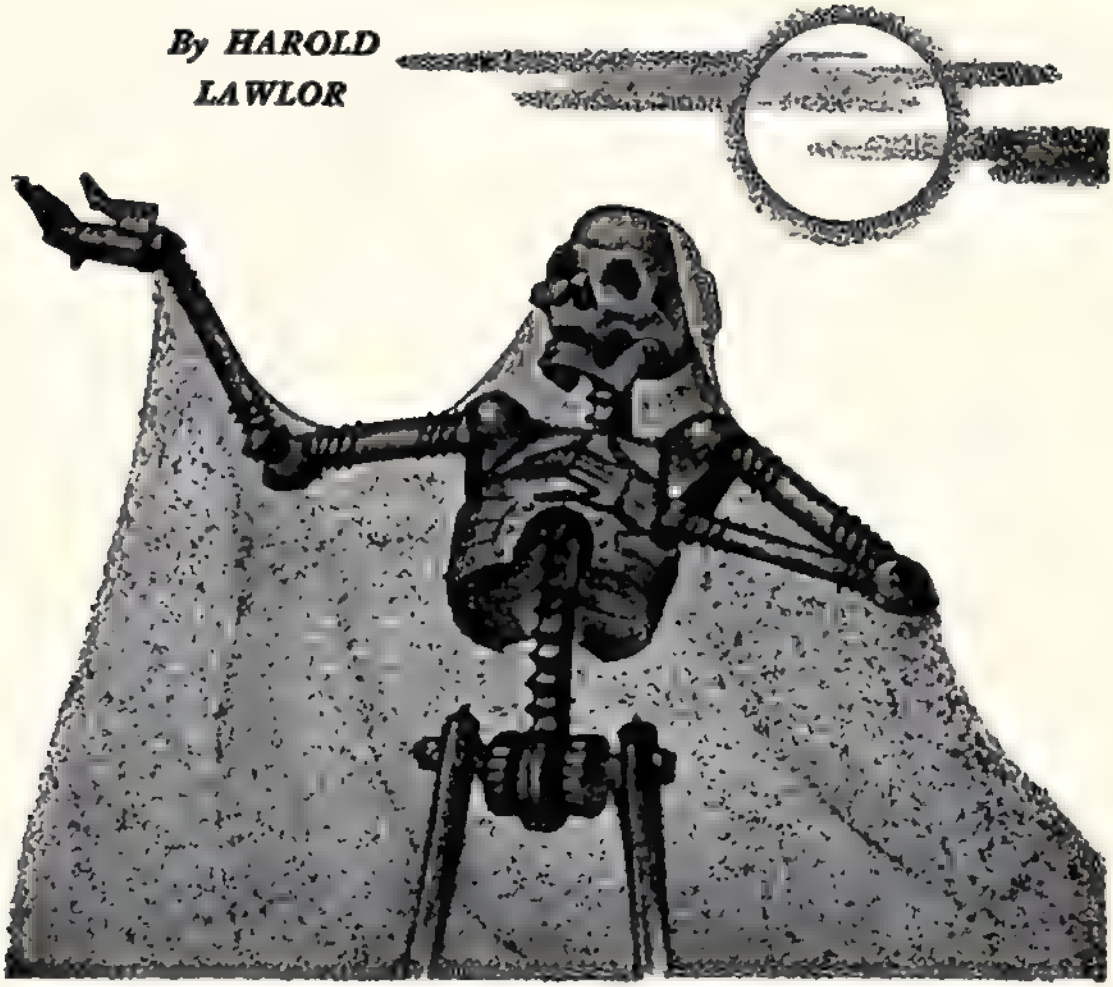
By Frank Owen

WEIRD TALES FOR JULY

● **Out May First** ●

Specter in the Steel

By ***HAROLD LAWLOR***



WITH trembling fingers I turned the radio dial, cutting off abruptly the tired, skeptical, well-bred voice of Bartholomew Olcott—critic, writer, and *raconteur*.

Shaken, I leaned back in my chair. I had it now. The ultimate link in the weird chain of events centering about that doomed skyscraper of which I, Arthur Reynolds, had been manager—the Trevor Building. . . .

The thing began for me on the very

It was as though some malevolent gnome had been trapped between the inner and outer walls . . . a gnome with a penchant for destruction and driving men mad.

day the building was opened, and I took up my new duties. It began mildly enough—so mildly that I was totally unable to recognize it as the ominous forerunner of a fantastic series of events.

"Will you see Miss Manno, Mr. Reynolds?" my secretary asked me early that morning.

"Certainly," I said. "Show her in."

When she entered, I saw that Miss Mannon was a woman in her forties—sophisticated, hard-headed, unimaginative.

She began without preamble. "I'm the occupant of suite 1219, Mr. Reynolds, and I dislike to lodge a complaint the very first day. But I'm nearly going insane! Will you *please* tell the man in the office next to mine to stop singing?"

"Singing?" I repeated. We hear some strange complaints in a big building, but I'd hardly been prepared for this.

"Yes—over and over again, in a sort of monotone. It's maddening. I'm unable to concentrate." Miss Mannon ran a distracted hand through her softly waved hair. "And of all the inappropriate songs for a male voice! 'One Fine Day,' from 'Madame Butterfly'."

My first impulse was to laugh, but I knew it would never do to let her see that I wasn't taking her complaint seriously.

"But, Miss Mannon," I said, "you're the only tenant on that floor who has moved in! All the other offices are vacant. Perhaps the song is coming up the air-shaft from another floor?"

But she was not to be contradicted. "I thought of that," she said, "so I closed my window. But still the song was just as loud as ever. I tell you it's coming from the office next to mine."

Though she didn't seem the hysterical type, I knew I'd get nowhere arguing with her, so I said, "I'll go down to twelve with you, and take a look around."

We stepped out of the elevator on twelve and walked down the marble-walled corridor, threading our way through pails, scaffolds, stray wiring, and plasterers' equipment left by the workmen. The building was still not quite completed.

MISS MANNON had prudently locked the door of her office. But when she'd opened it and we stood inside the suite, we couldn't hear a thing.

"I can't understand it," she said. "It's been going on all morning, but the singing has stopped now."

To satisfy her, I opened every office on the corridor with my master key. They were all deserted, of course. There was no one on the whole floor but ourselves. Miss Mannon expressed herself as satisfied with my search, so I went back to my office, only mildly curious.

My telephone rang almost immediately.

"Miss Reynolds? This is Hubbard . . . of Hubbard, Hunt and Sloane, on the fifth floor. Will you come down here and shut off the radio in the next office, before we all go crazy?"

With a grimace, I held the receiver away from my ear. The extremely irate voice of Mr. Hubbard shouted on.

"Some fool has gone off and left the radio going. I sent the office boy to ask them to shut it off, but he can't get any answer."

"I'll be right down," I promised.

But first I looked at the building chart.

Five hundred and three and 505, the suites next to Hubbard, were still vacant!

Hubbard, the choleric little lawyer, met me on the fifth floor.

"It's some guy singing grand opera!" His face purpled. "Goddlemighty, grand opera at ten in the morning! And me with a brief to prepare!"

I tut-tutted appropriately, and asked, "Which office is the sound coming from?"

As I'd expected, he indicated one of the empty suites—503. I wasn't alarmed at that time, yet I remember having diffi-

culty in finding the keyhole. Perhaps it was some sixth sense that made my hand shake. Yet, when I finally succeeded in opening the door and we went in, there was nothing. Not a sound of any kind. The office was deserted.

"I can't understand it," Hubbard said, somewhat embarrassed. "It was going full-blast a minute ago when I came out to meet you. My office boy heard it too. A man singing—"

"'One Fine Day' from 'Butterfly'," I said absently. I could have bitten out my tongue an instant later.

"Hah!" Hubbard was staring at me. "So you heard it too?"

I didn't think it wise to tell him about Miss Mannon. So I tried to laugh it off. "I must be psychic. I don't know what made me think of that particular song."

Hubbard looked at me suspiciously, but he let it go.

Well, it was curious of course, but not particularly alarming. When no more complaints came in that day, I just dismissed it as one of those things. But the next morning it came up again, unpleasantly enough.

For it was the very next day that the chief elevator operator came in to have a word with me.

"The operator on duty last night, Mr. Reynolds, says there's something wrong with car 8."

"How can that be?" I asked. "All elevators were inspected by the city three days ago and pronounced fit for service."

"I know, sir," Chief Operator Jennings agreed. "But Hanson says the car was sticking between floors, and shaking violently, all night long. And he says . . ." Jennings stopped uncomfortably.

"Well?"

"Hanson says that there was some guy *singing* all the time."

Before I realized how it would sound, I blurted out, "What was the name of the song?"

Jennings gave me a peculiar look. "Geez, I didn't ask him. *I* thought he was nuts."

It was only too obvious that Jennings thought I also had gone crazy. To cover my confusion, I said. "Bring Hanson here. We'll get this straightened out."

"Hanson quit this morning. He said he wouldn't spend another hour in this place. He said . . ." Jennings coughed, "Well, he said, 'The dump is haunted,' and he beat it."

WHEN Jennings left, I sank into a chair. I was beginning to think the "dump" was haunted myself. I was sure of it five minutes later. Miss Mannon came into my office without knocking, pushing her way past my secretary, her hair disheveled.

"That singing has started," Miss Mannon said. She shivered. "There's something—*uncanny* about it! I can't stand it. Frankly, I'm scared. I'm moving out."

"But you just moved in yesterday!" I protested.

"Nevertheless I've already called the moving men—to come this afternoon."

It was no time to be diplomatic. "You have a lease," I pointed out sternly. "If you move, we'll sue you for breaking it."

Miss Mannon was not to be coerced. "Try it," she threatened as she turned to leave, "and I'll spread this story all over Chicago. How would you like to have it known that the Trevor Building is haunted?"

Well, I wouldn't like it. And neither would the board of directors.

Miss Mannon moved out, bag and baggage, late that afternoon. That evening, after dinner, I went back to the Trevor Building, determined to rout out this mysterious singer if I had to spend the whole night doing it.

I found Jennings himself on the night elevator.

"Take me up to twelve, please," I said.

Twice the voice had been heard singing in Miss Mannon's office. It seemed the logical place to start my investigations.

Jennings closed the bronze gates and we started upward. Between the sixth and seventh floors, without warning, the car stopped. Jennings zig-zagged the control lever back and forth rapidly. The car remained stationary. His puzzled face was just turning to look over his shoulder at me when it happened.

The car began to sway from side to side! Gently at first, but rapidly increasing its arc until it resembled a pendulum gone suddenly mad.

JENNINGS went white as a sheet. I felt as if icy fingers were trailing up and down the length of my spine. We clutched the bars at either side of the lurching cage.

Then, abruptly as it had started, the swaying ceased and the car began to resume its ascent as though nothing had happened.

When I got out on twelve, I'll admit that my forehead was wet with sweat. Jennings left the car, too, and I could see he was anything but eager to run it down to the first floor again. Since it was unlikely anyone would come into the building, I told him to leave the car there at the twelfth floor with the gates open. He stood just outside it in the corridor.

I could feel his eyes following me until I opened the door of suite 1219 and went in.

The first five hours of my watch were decidedly boring. There wasn't a sound. Once, when I looked out at Jennings, I saw he was sitting on the marble floor, his back to a pillar, sound asleep. I went back into 1219, and sat down on the floor there myself. There weren't any chairs. But uncomfortable as I was I must have fallen asleep.

I awakened with a start. The lights were full on, and it took me a minute to orient myself. And then I heard it—a soft, eerie, muted whisper.

"Let me out! Let me out! Let me out!"

Hushed as it was, there was yet such a desperate urgency behind it that I felt my scalp crawl. I rose to my feet slowly, quietly as I could, and threw open the connecting doors between offices.

Nothing. No one.

I went back to the main office of the suite and stood in its exact center. I hate to admit how scared I was as I stood there under the brilliant shower of light from the unshaded electric fixture.

And then it came!

A beautiful tenor voice singing heartbrokenly. My flesh seemed to creep up and down my bones as I recognized Cho-Cho-San's sad aria from "Madame Butterfly"!

I went out of that office like a streak of light! And that damned voice seemed to follow me, increasing in volume until it was echoing and reverberating from the marble panels lining the corridor.

Jennings was standing at the elevator, wide-awake, his mouth open, his eyes staring.

I was almost relieved when I realized that he was hearing the song, too. We fell over each other getting into the elevator. But before we could close the gates for the descent, we heard—

The song ending on a swift, horrified intake of breath! A desperate gasp that was somehow more terrifying than any scream would be.

It was enough to send Jennings and me and the elevator plummeting downward to safety and sanity.

I'D HAD enough. In the morning I got in touch with Gilbert, chairman of the board of the Trevor Estate that owned the building, and he called an immediate meeting of the board members at my urgent suggestion.

But they listened to my story with irritat-

ing skepticism. When I'd finished, I saw they hadn't believed a word of it.

"Perhaps," one of them suggested suavely, "Mr. Reynolds is overworking. Perhaps we should install a new building manager."

I was just angry enough at the veiled threat to shrug and say, "As you like."

But in the end I wasn't fired. Only, the board made it clear, they preferred reading fantastic mystery stories in books and magazines.

They did not want to hear them from a man to whom they were paying five hundred dollars a month for managing an office building. However, this time they would kindly ignore the preposterous tale I'd wasted their valuable time in relating.

They "kindly ignored" it for just one week. Then the truth of what I'd told them was brought home so forcibly that even their thick skulls were penetrated.

Every tenant in the Tervor Building moved out!

And they all gave the same excuse. They were slowly being driven mad by a tenor voice singing "One Fine Day" from Puccini's opera, "Madame Butterfly."

It was fantastic! It was ridiculous! But it had happened.

The board members were nearly frantic. Here they had an investment running into the millions of dollars. Interest payments must be met; there were salaries and building maintenance expenses to be considered. We must do something! Anything!

A corps of radio experts was called in, and a search was instituted for a possible hidden dictaphone. But nothing was found. Oh, they heard the voice singing, all right, at intervals. But it leaped from floor to floor, from room to room. Hundreds of dictaphones wouldn't suffice to preserve the illusion over such widely separated distances. The radio experts were baffled.

And then almost impishly the Spectral Voice, as I'd come to call it, stopped singing!

We were almost afraid to believe it. But when several days had passed, and we heard it no more, we thought we were rid of the jinx. Almost holding our breath we concentrated on the long business of renting the suites again. Weeks passed, and gradually the building filled up. The Spectral Voice left us in peace. I breathed a sigh of relief and hoped it had left us forever.

My hope was short-lived.

I WENT downtown one morning to find the police waiting for me in the lobby. And every window in the Trevor Building was shattered! Nor was this all. Great cracks ran crazily across ceilings and walls. Marble panels had loosened and fallen to shatter themselves on the corridor floors.

No one had been in the building the night before, save Jennings, the chief elevator operator. The police told me that they'd had a phone call—highly incoherent—and when they'd rushed over they'd found Jennings prostrate in the lobby.

"Where is he now?" I managed to get it out. But I couldn't tear my eyes from the appalling destruction that had taken place in the Trevor Building overnight. "Where is Jennings?"

"In Samaritan Hospital."

After phoning the board members, I taxied to the hospital. They let me see Jennings for fifteen minutes, and I must say the man seemed in a bad way. Nervous shock, the doctors had diagnosed it. And the man was unable to tell them what had happened to him.

But when the nurse left us alone, Jennings clutched my arm and drew me down close to the bed.

"Mr. Reynolds," he whispered. "I didn't tell anybody, because I was afraid they'd think I was crazy. But it was . . . the *Voice!*"

I moistened my lips. "Tell me."

Jennings struggled up against his pillow. His palm left a damp stain on the light sleeve of my coat.

"Mr. Reynolds, it was like this. Everyone had signed out of the building. It had been quiet all night. About 5:30 this morning I went up to the washroom on the eighth floor. When I went back to the elevator and started down from eight, it began. The car didn't stall, but it began to sway again . . . you know?"

I nodded.

Jennings went on in a hoarse whisper. "The Voice didn't sing. It started to yell, 'Let me out! Let me out!' And then . . . then I could feel the whole damn building move. It was rocking back and forth, like there was something inside the very walls trying to get out. I could hear glass breaking and the walls cracking. . . . I thought the whole place was coming down. By the time I reached the lobby floor and phoned the police, I was so scared that I must have collapsed."

Jennings stopped, and his eyes searched my face. "Mr. Reynolds, what *is* it?"

"I don't know." But I wondered if some malevolent gnome weren't cloistered between the inner and outer walls of the Trevor Building. A gnome with a talent for destruction, taking an unholy delight in driving men mad.

I got up to leave. "Better stay here a few days. . . . I'll see that the bills are paid. And, Jennings . . . don't do any talking."

"You bet I won't!" Jennings promised.

When I left the hospital, I went back to the office and found I had the city building inspectors on my hands. Rumor of the weird destruction in the Trevor Building had reached their ears. They insisted on getting in touch with McKinnon and Laird, the general contractors who'd built the building. McKinnon himself came over, and in a body they inspected the foundations, prepared to find that the trouble was due to faulty footings. But they drew an absolute blank. By every test, the construction was sound.

Naturally I said nothing about the Spectral Voice. But I'd been doing plenty of thinking. When the opportunity offered I drew McKinnon aside.

"Who had the steel contract for the building?" I asked.

"The Bauling Steel Mills, just south of here," he answered readily enough, but I could see he was puzzled by my question. "Why do you ask?"

I gave him an evasive answer, and could hardly wait till he and the city inspectors left. When they'd gone, I went for my car and headed south to the Bauling Steel Mills.

LUCKILY Curtis Bauling, the president, was in and would see me. But when I was alone with him in his office, I hardly knew how to begin. I took a deep breath and plunged.

"Mr. Bauling, we've had some fantastic occurrences in the Trevor Building here lately. I'm trying to get at the bottom of it." I hesitated, and went off at a tangent. "Did you ever hear of the man in the East who received radio programs through the fillings in his teeth?"

Bauling, thin, dark, partially bald, looked at me as if he thought he ought to call the wagon. But he said tentatively, "I remember seeing something—"

"Well, that's what brought me here. I remembered that story, and it raised a question in my mind. A question I want you to answer. In your opinion, could the steel in the Trevor Building be acting as a transmitter of sounds?"

Bauling was frankly bewildered. "My dear man, I should think it extremely unlikely. You mean to tell me radio programs are being picked up and broadcasted—"

"Not programs." I floundered, and be-

gan to wish I hadn't come. Bauling's penetrating eyes on mine clearly indicated his doubts of my sanity. "Not programs," I repeated, "just songs. Or rather, the same song, over and over. 'One Fine Day' from 'Madame—' "

I was hardly prepared for his reaction. He jumped up as if galvanized. *"What!"*

"You know something?" I didn't need to ask. The man was actually shaking.

He sank into his chair again weakly, and frankly mopped his brow. "It couldn't be," he muttered.

I told him the whole story then—the song, the cries of 'Let me out!' the destruction, the whole crazy tale. By the time I'd finished, Curtis Bauling was staring at me open-mouthed. With shaking hands, he poured himself a drink from the carafe on his desk. And then he told me.

"Mr. Reynolds, something happened here in the mills some months ago, which seems to have a connection with the story that you've just told me.

"We had a steel worker here—a Neapolitan by the name of Pietro Liguoni. One night while we were working overtime on the steel order for the Trevor Building, Liguoni disappeared. Just vanished. His time-card showed that he had checked in as usual, but there was no record of his checking out. He'd always been a reliable worker and we couldn't understand his sudden disappearance. However, we did nothing about it.

"But the next day, we had the police here, brought by a girl named Rosa Corrado. The girl was in an hysterical condition. She swore Liguoni had been murdered . . . and she named the murderer as being Stepan Vierenko, a Slav, who also worked here in the plant, almost at Liguoni's side."

"The usual triangle?" I asked.

Bauling nodded. "Both men were in love with Rosa Corrado, but she'd chosen Liguoni and this very day had been set for their wedding. When he'd disappeared, she swore that Vierenko had done him in. Well, she had no proof but the accusation was too serious to ignore. We called Vierenko in, and he was grilled for hours. But he swore stoutly that he hadn't murdered the Neapolitan, and his story couldn't be shaken. The police could do nothing further, because—well, *corpus delicti*, you know. Liguoni's body hadn't been found."

Bauling paused for so long that I prompted, "And was that the end of it?"

"No. Rosa Corrado killed herself a week later. Grief and despondency."

"Oh," I said. "And Vierenko? . . . he was fired?"

"No, I kept him on. There was no proof, and maybe he *was* innocent. You understand my position? But just the same, I wondered. Vierenko and Liguoni worked together . . . over vats of molten steel. A body falling into such a flaming cauldron—"

"Or *pushed* . . ."

Bauling nodded. "There would be absolutely no trace. Liguoni would disappear as if he'd never been."

I shuddered. But I was puzzled. "Still," I said doubtfully, "I can't see what this has to do with the troubles in the Trevor Building."

"Only this," Bauling said. "Liguoni had a very fine tenor voice. He was always singing at his work, and was in great demand as a singer at parties. But no one ever heard him sing anything but—"

So here it was again!

" 'One Fine Day'," I said slowly.

"Exactly," Bauling confirmed. "So you see why your story startled me? If Vierenko *had* pushed Pietro Liguoni into the vat, he'd be a part of the steel in the Trevor Building! Maybe it is Liguoni singing! Maybe these fantastic happenings are due to the efforts of Liguoni's spirit seeking to escape from the steel in which it is now incorporated!"

Bauling and I stared uncomfortably at each other over the polished mahogany of his desk, embarrassed at this excursion into mysticism.

Nevertheless, though he'd been convincing, after a good night's sleep I dismissed Bauling's theory as preposterous.

ONE morning, a week later, I left my car at the parking lot and walked to the Trevor Building. When I reached the corner I saw a black, ant-like crowd of people. With a sinking heart, I sensed what they were staring at, even before I rounded the corner.

The sidewalk and street were roped off, and the huge crowd of people were gaping in fascinated horror.

The Trevor Building was rocking on its foundations!

The sight was indescribable! That towering skyscraper of white terra cotta reeling from side to side, the golden flagpole at its apex catching and reflecting rays from the morning sun.

Superstitious fear was clammy around my heart. What hellish thing was this that had the Trevor Building in its grip?

One of the policemen holding back the crowd passed a hand over his eyes unbelievingly. "Did yez ever see the like?" he whispered in awe. "Did yez ever—"

With an ear-splitting roar, sections of the cornice were torn from their mortar, and plummeted downward to the sidewalk. The crowd surged backward. Windows shattered brittly. There was the wrenching roar of twisted metal. The din was terrific.

And then, as if it had spent its wrath, the building settled back on its foundations. The silence, after the noise, was almost deafening. We stared at the sorry spectacle of the once-proud skyscraper. And its broken windows stared back at us blankly, owlishly secretive.

Well, there was no hushing up *that* story. At a hastily convened meeting, the mayor ordered the city council to act at once. The Trevor Building was condemned as unsafe, and its razing was ordered to start immediately.

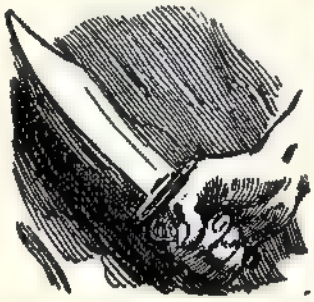
I had visions of long-drawn out law-

JACK THE RIPPER KILLS AGAIN!

And again he brings death with a knife. Who is he? A mad surgeon? A butcher? An insane scientist?

Follow this trail of blood to a ghastly rendezvous with the most dangerous maniac of all time!

This tale of murder, incredible menace and an ageless monster is told us in:



Yours Truly — Jack the Ripper

By Robert Bloch

Coming in the July WEIRD TALES

suits. But surprisingly enough, the board of directors of the Trevor Building made absolutely no demur. I thought at first it was because they were to stunned. But as Gilbert, the chairman, told me later, to a man they were frightened. Hideously frightened by this Frankenstein's monster in steel and terra cotta. And, in any case, they realized it would cost a fortune to put the building back in operable condition.

Within the week, then, the Trevor Building was in the wreckers' hands. Those of its fittings that could be salvaged were auctioned off. The steel went back to the Bauling Mills as scrap, to be melted down for war material. A two-story taxpayer was erected on the old foundation.

I breathed a sigh of relief. The skyscraper and its strange curse were no more. The steel of which it had been fabricated would soon be transmuted into tanks, shells, planes—dispersed to the battle arenas of the world. The story, I thought, was ended now.

But it wasn't.

Two nights later, a headline in the *Courier* screamed:

TREVOR BUILDING CURSE
LIVES ON!

"Late yesterday afternoon, a T-beam from the razed Trevor Building slipped from its crane while being unloaded at the Bauling Steel Works. Not hearing warning cries, a workman, Stepan Vierenko, was crushed to death beneath its weight. It is believed . . ."

I read it twice before I realized.

Stepan Vierenko!

AFTER that, there was nothing for a year, and the story began to fade from my mind. The Trevor Building was forgotten by the hurrying, war-worried city. When I thought of it at all, its curse seemed but a strange series of coincidences. And Bauling's theory of Liguoni's spirit seeking escape was, of course, only the most arrant nonsense.

Until the other evening, when I heard Bartholomew Olcott's broadcast. I was dialing for another program, and by some quirk of Fate caught the latter part of Olcott's.

". . . As an example of the absurd legends that war breeds," I recognized Olcott's wearily ironic tones, "let me cite the newest one that is lately going the rounds.

"This fanciful tale is said to have originated with some of the natives of a small French town, shortly after the Second Front was opened. Peering from a bomb shelter, as American artillery shelled the Nazi lines just beyond the village, you may imagine for yourselves the natives' excitement as they saw a shell explode.

"And here is what the legend-bearers would have you believe. Just as the shell burst with a roar and splintering of steel, a white dove was seen to soar upward! And, to make a good story better, the white dove was singing, if you please! Naturally you'll be all agog to know *what* the white dove was singing. And you'll be happy to learn that the legend obligingly gives us this information, too.

"With a positive genius for the inappropriate, the white dove, dear radio listeners, was singing 'One Fine Day' from 'Madame Butterfly'! Now isn't—"

"One Fine Day" from "Madame Butterfly"! A white dove soaring upward!

With trembling fingers I turned the radio dial, cutting off abruptly the tired, skeptical, well-bred voice of Bartholomew Olcott—critic, writer, and *raconteur*.

Shaken, I leaned back in my chair. I had it now. The ultimate link in the weird chain of events centering about that doomed skyscraper of which I, Arthur Reynolds, had been manager—the Trevor Building. . . .

Time and Again

By Helen W. Kasson

THE clock had run slow, always. No matter how the tempo of life increased, no matter how the wind flew, or the kettle boiled, or the swing music beat from the ultra-modern radio standing in a corner of the small, vine-shaded living room, the clock ran slow. And Kathleen hated it.

"Time is a circle, vast or small;
Time is a ceaseless, rolling ball;
Time and again the hour comes round;
Till I'm returned to my witching ground."

Week after week she pushed the hands ahead the hour they had lost, but it was only now, standing on tiptoe to dust its ugly encrusted surface—quietly, in order not to wake Ron sleeping in his chair with books and the Sunday paper scattered around him—that she discovered the tiny lever at its base. She peered closely, resting her chin on the mantel in an effort to read the minute letters above it. *"S to F,"* they said, with the lever squarely on S.

"No wonder it's always slow," she thought. "The thing needs regulating."

With the tip of her finger she pushed the lever forward all the way. If it ran too fast during the coming week she could adjust it. Then, for a moment, she raised her eyes to the dial. Three o'clock. Plenty of time still to finish what she had to do before dinner. Robin was playing out in front and here was Ron, sleeping away his Sunday—but then, what else was one to do in these days of gas rationing?

She turned from the clock, glad to release her eyes from the deformed four-toed animal stumps on which it stood, from the ugly Teutonic child figure at its top, wondering again for the hundredth time why Ron had ever acquired such an uncouth, repellent thing. Then, picking up a trailing plant from the edge of the mantel she carried it into the kitchen to be watered. She thought there was a stirring behind her as she left, but did not turn. There was too much to be done today. A man around the house slowed things up.

Soup was bubbling on the stove. In passing she turned down the gas to let it simmer. The dog Vicky looked up expectantly as Kathleen entered the kitchen, abandoned his bone and followed her to the sink, whining to be let out.

She sprayed water on the plant, carried it back through the living room and then opened the front door. Robin must be bounding a ball against the side of the house. Though she could not see him she could hear the sudden, regular thuds. Vicky squirmed past her legs and ran out the door.

Stepping carefully to avoid Ron's outstretched feet and the scattered papers, she went to the mantel and set the plant down. Then, a sensation of something wrong pressing her heart, she paused.

The hands of the clock stood at ten minutes past three.

It was, suddenly, very hot. Perspiration beaded her forehead. As she raised one hand to wipe it away a gust of fetid air caught her nostrils. From above a dense mist was settling over the mantel, wrapping the top of the clock where the figure of the child stood in an opaque, smoky veil. She turned involuntarily to Ron seeking explanation for the sudden hotness, the dank mist, the fetid odor. He still slept, looking strangely immature with his cheek pillowed against one hand.

As she started to speak she noticed that a blob of mist was settling beside his chair, a formless, inchoate mass of wetness which hung suspended for a moment like a giant jelly fish. And then, even as she watched it took form, sprouted arms and legs and head until, semi-human, half-familiar, it stood revealed before her—a squat, Teutonic figure with the face of a leering skull. A midget? An Evil Babe? Or the giant replica of some woodcarver's ancient nightmare?

THE figure stirred, moved its malignant eyes sidewise, reached out a hand to withdraw slowly from the holster which hung on the back of the chair Ron's service revolver.

For a moment the Babe stood, balancing the gun in his too-small hand, grinning at her and holding her eyes to his with a fixed, intent, malevolence of purpose against which she was powerless to move. From far away, as if billowing over moun-

tain, plain and ocean came the small, profane voice: *"Spirit to flesh. . . . Spirit to flesh. . . ."*

Helpless and bemused she waited, sensing as much as hearing the impious, piping tones, letting them bound untrammeled like a Devil's drum from brain to ear as she sought to find some shred of meaning in the words. And then, slowly, came memory of that small lever at the base of the clock, above which were scratched the letters *S to F*.

In moving the lever she had released the evil figure from whatever spell had held it bound, like Prometheus, at the top of the ancient clock.

But this was dream, phantasy, nightmare. Such things could not happen today in Inganamort, a modern, prosaic suburb of New York. Witchcraft was dead; spirits lived only in the hazy superstitious of the savage. Striving to rid memory of the desecration of the piping voice, she blinked her eyes to shut out sight of the evil she knew was there. She could neither move, forget, nor disbelieve.

Then again the Babe spoke: *"Time is a circle, vast or small. . . ."*

She groped for the meaning of the words, sensing it, yet unable quite to grasp it. Then suddenly the spell which held her static loosened; she walked across the room. As in a dream, without knowing whither nor why her hands moved or her voice spoke she opened the front door and called to Vicky, needing, perhaps, to feel the protection of the dog's presence.

He stood just below the stairs, his eyes showing white and angry below the V-point on his forehead.

"Vicky," she cried. "Come here! Come in here!"

Rabid with fear, he cowered back, growls coming deep and menacing from the back of his throat. In the face of his terror Kathleen abandoned hope of getting him inside and turned back to the living room. Ron still slept. Beside him the Evil Babe was waiting, grinning at her still, with the service revolver a bleak anachronism in his hand.

He drew her forward by the power of his eyes until she was in reaching distance. Then slowly his too-small hand extended and she felt cold steel against her fingers. Even as she fought against closing them around the revolver butt, she did so. She stepped back a pace, her finger on the trigger, the gun leveled at Ron's head. Then sudden realization flooded to her mind.

"No," she screamed. "No! I will not!"

RON slept on as if neither she nor the Babe were there, as if the scream which still beat the ceiling had never sounded.

The Babe shrugged, his eyes gleaming queerly and moving infinitesimally toward the window. At that moment, like a tendon's snapping, Kathleen was catapulted forward. She rested, panting, against the window pane, watching. . . .

Robin stood in the middle of the street picking up his ball. A car sped toward him. The horn tooted; Robin did not move. The car came on. There was a sickening screech of brakes.

At the window Kathleen screamed—a scream which came from the depths of her being. No—a scream conceived and born outside herself in some nether world of evil and mishap and sorrow and curses. As if her soul were on the rack being pulled, twisted, tortured and torn, for a long moment it writhed in agony until it seemed only shreds and gory remnants must be left. Then, as suddenly, it lay placid, as if the rack had been loosened or the Devil-torturer interrupted, called away to other evil.

The car had stopped within three feet of Robin. He stood in the middle of the street, slightly bemused, as if the sound memory of horn and speeding wheels had

just reached him and only now he was aware that he had been in the path of Death.

With a nervous smile—a smile, Kathleen knew, which was the forerunner of tears—he shrugged his little shoulders and started running toward the house.

Kathleen's tension broke. Shattered and weak, she said, "I'd die if that ever happened again. Thank heaven it's over!"

She turned, catching Ron's eyes as they opened sleepily, their sapphire-blue dull and hazy with sleep.

Faintly a voice murmured, "It's not over —yet." It was the Evil Babe.

The impious piping drew her back to a world of nightmare. As Ron closed his eyes and went back to sleep, again—more surely now—Kathleen realized that the octopus arms of evil emanating from the Smoky Babe had not touched him, that Ron still knew only a serene, devil-free world. Unaware of the presence of the demon, Ron's ears had, even, been deaf to Kathleen's scream of terror when she saw the danger her child was in.

Ron had awakened naturally, quietly—and as quietly gone back to sleep. And Kathleen must face this evil, this profanity against all things natural, alone.

Girding her strength she waited, tense and aghast with fear, for Robin's entrance. Would the child see the evil presence as she did or, like Ron, were his eyes attuned only to material things—to the furniture, the torn shoe lying on the floor where Vicky had dropped it, his own toy tank pushed carelessly beneath the couch? Kathleen waited, fearing yet longing to hear the sound of Robin's footsteps on the porch. It never came.

The gun still in her hand she had been riveted to the front window watching him walk toward the house. And then, suddenly, it was as if he walked into an empty void, into nothingness. One instant he was there; the next he was not.

Faintness rocked her, blackness plunged into her eyes. In the next moment her whole body ceased to function. It was as if some power had seized the cogged wheel on which her life depended and held it back, static and motionless.

Then suddenly the wheel was released. Blood coursed through her veins again. And she was standing before the mantel, the gun gone from her hand, her eyes fixed on the dial of the ancient clock.

It was three o'clock.

Plenty of time to finish what she had to do before dinner. Robin was outside playing. . . . *Robin was outside playing. . . .* She paused, a curious, uncertain foreboding harrying her mind. Shrugging it off and without further thought she moved her eyes back to the clock. A mist lay thick about its top veiling the squat Teutonic figure. "Fog," she mused drearily, as in a dream. And it must be fog too which dripped down the revolting, misshapen, monstrous leg-stumps on which the clock-base rested. It must be fog. . . .

It could not be blood.

Only a small, emotionless part of her mind saw and understood. It was as if each moment cut off memory completely from the moment immediately preceding, as if her eyes recorded, her mind grasped—and then her mind forgot. Robot-like she turned, picked up the trailing plant from the edge of the mantel and carried it to the kitchen to be watered. Perhaps there was a stirring behind her as she left. Perhaps there was the bubbling of evil laughter. If there was, she heard, recorded and forgot it. There was much to be done today. A man around the house slowed things up.

AS SHE passed the stove, Kathleen lowered the flame under the soup to let it simmer. There was a tiny, troubling thought at the back of her mind — a thought she could not quite place, nor clearly define. She cast it off, walked to

the sink and sprayed water on the plant, half consciously noting that its leaves were withered and curling. But in the next second she had forgotten. Wiping off the outside of the flower pot she turned back to the living room. Stepping carefully to avoid Ron's outstretched legs and the scattered Sunday papers she walked to the mantel and set the plant down. . . .

THEN, and then only, did she pause, a constricting fear girdling mind and throat. Her forehead was damp and burning. Breath came hard against the hot, rotting mist which pressed her nostrils. The top of the clock where the figure of the child had stood was no longer visible; the deformed, four-toed stumps on which the base rested gleamed with a sticky redness which turned her stomach.

The hands of the clock stood at ten minutes past three.

She whirled quickly under the impact of sudden, recurring memory.

Ron slept in the chair his cheek pillowed against one hand, but there beside him was what memory had shunned—the smoky, evil figure of the child, his hand just reaching out to remove Ron's service revolver from its holster.

Again he stood (Yes, it was again! She knew it now) grinning at her, balancing the gun in his tiny hand, pinning her eyes to his with the same evil purpose as before, holding her powerless to move.

Yet now memory was half alive. She knew he would speak, knew that soon, against volition, she would somehow again hold the revolver in her hand, that her finger would tighten on the trigger as the gun was leveled at Ron's head.

Farther she dared not think. Forcing forgetfulness, she anchored to a thought adrift far back in her mind: *The clock is a machine to imitate the rotation of the earth.* Yet with that thought the diabolical maze in which she was caught started to reveal itself and fear's tightening fingers bound her heart.

The Babe spoke: *"Time is a ceaseless, rolling ball. . . ."*

The sinister, shrill voice nibbled her mind, tantalizing it with meaning approached, yet not quite reached. Having an overwhelming premonition of tragedy, yet she could not follow it to its end, could not recall the ultimate resolution of the Devil Babe's plan. For clear realization she would have to wait with this evil spell upon her until the full time-cycle had run its course.

And still Ron slept.

Eyes still glued to the leering skull of the Babe's face she sensed rather than saw the gun extended in his tiny hand, felt the nightmare of steel cold against her fingers and her arm—not a part of her but a dead, lifeless weight—raised as if lifted by a derrick.

"No," she cried. "No!"

Yet even as she screamed somehow the gun had leveled itself to Ron's head, somehow her finger was tight against the trigger. She fought desperately to loose her grip. Her fingers held static and stiff.

"No," she repeated numbly, straining against the power which bade her shoot. "No. I will not."

The Babe shrugged, turning with a slight, easy motion toward the front of the house.

The tendon which held her snapped and Kathleen was catapulted toward the window. Panting, she watched through the pane. Again Robin stooped to pick up the ball in the middle of the street with the car speeding toward him. The horn blared, the car came on, the brakes screeched.

Kathleen screamed.

The car stopped within a few inches of Robin.

It had been three feet before.

From behind her came soft, evil laughter. Shaken and weak she saw Robin

smile nervously and start running toward the house, knowing even that he then would never reach it, that he would run again into that timeless void. Was she to stand forever awaiting her child's footsteps on the porch? Would the hands of time never pass three o'clock for her? Never, until the evil presence was banished!

Again she realized wherefrom all this anguish had stemmed. In sudden rage, she demanded, "Ron! *How did you get that clock?*"

His eyes opened slowly, not dull nor hazy with sleep this time but cold, sapphire blue against the raw pallor of his face. It was as if a demon had entered him while he slept. A streak of pale sunlight brushed his hair, changing it queerly to blackish flame. There was fear in his eyes—and more. There was anger—anger at her for reviving a memory better off dead, a memory he had been trying for years to kill.

The clock, she knew came from the mountains of Rumania. But Ron had never told more than that. *How* he had come by it was a secret held strangled in the prison of his past. Yet in that "how" lay the reason for this present curse, which Kathleen must face now alone.

Her anger died as Ron went quietly back to sleep. For only a moment had the demon shone through his eyes. Only a moment, but it was long enough to show Kathleen the full power of the thing she was fighting. "A double curse," she thought despondently. "If Ron dies by my hand I will have to pay for his life with my own." Strange, that ancient evil should use modern justice for its own ends. For her death, she knew, was part of the Devil Babe's plans. Somehow, by marrying Ron, she had been drawn into the curse.

Hopelessly Kathleen awaited the sound of Robin's footsteps on the porch, but again he came only so far and disappeared —again he walked into that black emptiness where time stood still. Faintness seized her. Through the static, zero moment came a blasphemous, piping voice.

"Your husband or your child. . . . If you don't shoot next time, the car will kill your child. . . ."

Then suddenly Kathleen was standing before the mantel again, her eyes fixed on the dial of the ancient clock. And for the third time today, it was three o'clock!

But now her memory retained in glaring, clear-cut lines all that had gone before. Now, with near disaster upon her she knew Ron had stolen the clock from whatever devil-power owned it and that the debt must be paid with his life and hers; she knew that if Ron did not die Robin would, under the wheels of the speeding car. The Evil Babe would exact implacable revenge. Whatever road she chose tragedy awaited.

Her husband or her child? Ron and Kathleen—or Robin. The choice was hers.

Mindless and against volition her body moved to the end of the mantel. Perspiration beaded her forehead. She breathed with difficulty against the hot, rotten air thick and heavy around the clock. The smell of blood choked her. The noxious four-toed animal stumps seemed to writhe in gory ecstasy.

Like an automaton she picked up the trailing plant and carried it to the kitchen. Its leaves were putrid and rotten now and she turned her head aside to escape the stench which rose from them. As she left the living room, laughter, triumphant now and confident that soon the terrible mission would be accomplished, bellowed to the walls.

On entering the kitchen, again the tiny, troubling thought tantalized her mind. She could not place it. From the soup bubbling on the stove a rancid smell arose. There was a heavy fog in all the rooms now as if the presence of the Devil Babe had tainted, had soiled and corrupted and misted with evil, everything within the house. Even

Ron, Kathleen thought, shuddering anew at the demon's light which had shone for a moment in his eyes. Had it been minutes, hours or measureless eternities before? Never mind. It had not been Ron glaring at her in that instant. It had been the demon Fear showing from behind his eyes. Ron was the same; Ron would not change. But on Kathleen rested the responsibility of saving him from the consequences of an impetuous, youthful act. She must save him, herself and Robin.

Automatically she turned down the flame under the soup, walked to the sink and sprayed water on the rotting plant, her mind too strangled and bemused by terror to wonder of what use water would be to the decomposing vegetation. Then, carrying it back to the living room, again, for the third time that day, she walked to the mantel and set the plant down. . . .

HER head held rigid as by a vise she stood dreading the time when she must turn to face the Evil Babe. Though the moment had almost come, until the split second when the spell was lifted she must stand motionless, waiting. Now she had almost reached the end of the diabolic thread which was trammeling her life, weighing her down with the leadenness of evil. Whether she would or no she must follow the thread to its end. Evil plans once put into action must resolve.

Caught in the maze of routine she had followed twice before that day she rested her eyes again upon the clock. Its hands stood at ten minutes past three. Gasping, her nostrils smothered in the heavy mist which dimmed the room, her lungs bursting for air against its fetid rottenness, she knew the moment had come when she must turn.

Mind and body shrieking "Stay!" she fought to break the invisible cord which drew her into motion as if by standing riveted to the mantel she could prolong the moment, hold time back by sheer force of will and so, perhaps, prevent the imminent, tragic resolution of the Devil Babe's plans.

But the thread of evil was too strong. Against will she felt her muscles turning. Just as her eyes left the clock she saw the gory animal stumps move, the base crawl forward.

She could not turn back. Once started on the small, relentless time cycle she could neither pause nor change her actions until its end was reached.

Now her eyes rested, as they were destined to, on Ron. He slept peacefully, untroubled, like a carefree child. Beside the chair the Evil Babe was waiting, his hand just reaching out again to remove the revolver from its holster.

The Babe grinned, weighing the gun in his tiny, mal-formed hand. Unable to tear her eyes from the bottomless pits of his, she awaited the reedy, profane voice.

It came, repeating the two lines spoken before and finishing the quatrain, stating clearly now with hard, vindictive malice what she already knew.

"Time is a circle, vast or small
Time is a ceaseless, rolling ball
Time and again the hour comes round
Till I'm returned to my witching ground."

Now his grin held a surety it had not had before. He leaned forward and again she found the revolver gripped tightly in her unwilling fingers.

"Release me!" the Babe croaked.

The gun riveted to her hand, she cried for the third time, "No!"

"The choice is yours," the Babe said, "your husband or your child," and turned toward the window.

Even as he spoke, from far down the block came the sound of a car approaching. Robin was standing in the street, picking up his ball. . . . The car would hit him this time!

The mother in her rose fierce and fight-

ing. She turned the gun on Ron, tightening her finger on the trigger. Then, in a quick flash, the thought which had nagged her mind twice before clarified itself, took form. Twice on entering the kitchen she had had a sensation of something wrong, something lacking. Now, suddenly, she knew what it was.

According to the Evil Babe she had slipped back in time, had relived the small, ten minute cycle three times. If that were true, everything would be the same each time. Was it?

No. Things had progressed, changed. The plant had rotted, the mist grown heavier—and the car had come closer to hitting Robin. But there was one more discrepancy—one telling, important imperfection which convinced her and sent her heart bounding elatedly.

The first time she had carried the plant into the kitchen, Vicky the dog had been lying there chewing a bone. She had let him out the front door, and later tried to call him back. He had refused to come. The second and third times she had gone into the kitchen, Vicky had not been there!

Vicky had not slipped back in time. Had Ron? Had Robin?

It didn't matter. The mere fact that the dog had, only once, played a part in the weird drama proved that the time repetition was not real—that it was a hallucination, a spell upon her cast by the Evil Babe. Kathleen had been deluded into *thinking* time repeated, into thinking she performed the same acts three times. Possibly she was still dreaming, still living in that moment of blackness into which she had sunk the first time she had seen Robin nearly struck by the car. At any rate the car had not hit Robin that time, therefore it *could* not hit him now.

Nevertheless, the spell was still upon her. There was the Evil Babe, trembling with rage incarnate as if he resented her struggle to break free. Red sparks glinted his eyes. She felt them burning . . . burning . . . felt will slip from her. Her fingers tightened on the gun.

WITH sudden strength she wrenched backward and, for a moment, she was free. "You can't frighten me," she cried. "Time is. What *has* happened, is. I will not shoot!"

With a slight, almost imperceptible motion, the Babe twitched his head toward the window. The harsh sound of a car horn broke the still air. Robin was there, in the street. Couldn't the car hit him? *Couldn't it?*

In an ecstasy of fear, Kathleen swung around and pressed the trigger of the gun. There was a deafening howl of pain, a blackness, a billowing of thick smoke which blew toward the window and hung there suspended. The clock jumped from the mantel to fall shattered on the floor.

Kathleen blinked, straining her eyes through the smoke. The place beside Ron's chair was empty. The Evil Babe was gone.

Wakened abruptly by the gunshot, Ron leaped from his chair.

"What in the world—" he shouted. Then, seeing the smoking gun still clutched in her hand, finished curtly, "Kathleen, whatever possessed you? You've completely ruined the clock."

Trembling, she looked up, half afraid to meet his eyes. Was the Demon completely banished, or had it left part of its curse on Ron?

Ron's eyes were cool sapphire-blue, demon-free, having no recollection in them of other than a pleasant, sleepy Sunday spent in the quiet living room of the house in Inganamort.

"I was fooling with your gun," she said tremulously. ". . . It went off."

Even as the words left her lips her heart contracted with fear. Robin had not yet come in! Had the screeching, hastily ap-

plied brakes gripped the wheels of the car in time?

Counting the seconds she waited, not daring to move toward the window. Now Robin would be standing, slightly bemused, in the middle of the street. Now, with that nervous smile, he had shrugged his shoulders and started for the house. One second . . . two . . . .Where was he now? Just to the sidewalk—or had he already walked into that black, timeless void?

Suppose the shattering of the clock had not destroyed the Evil Babe, had not broken the spell. Would then the hands of time never pass three o'clock for her? Was she to live forever slipping back in time, forever to live and die in these horrible, tortured moments?

From the floor beside her, the spring of the clock gave one angry whirr. She jumped.

Then suddenly she heard the sound of Robin's footsteps on the porch.

Dialogue

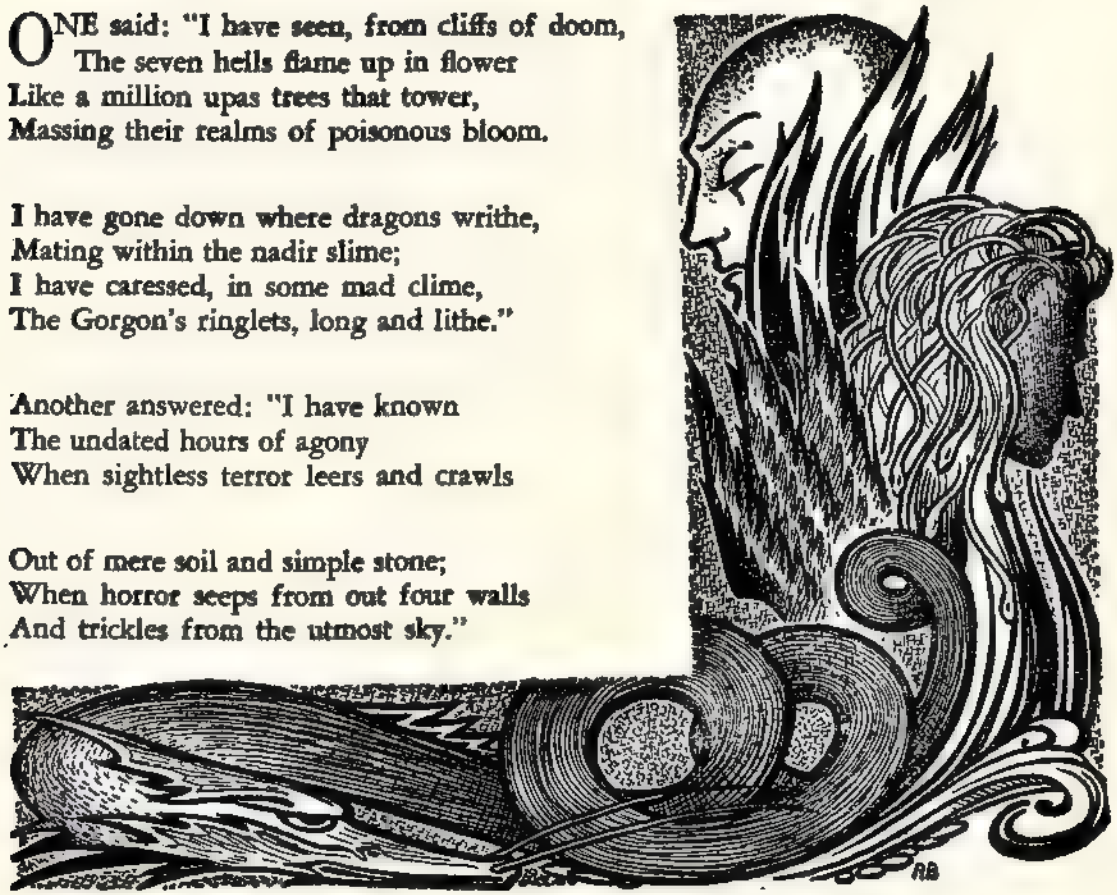
By TIMEUS GAYLORD

ONE said: "I have seen, from cliffs of doom,
The seven hells flame up in flower
Like a million upas trees that tower,
Massing their realms of poisonous bloom.

I have gone down where dragons writhe,
Mating within the nadir slime;
I have caressed, in some mad clime,
The Gorgon's ringlets, long and lithe."

Another answered: "I have known
The undated hours of agony
When sightless terror leers and crawls

Out of mere soil and simple stone;
When horror seeps from out four walls
And trickles from the utmost sky."



The Miracle

By SEABURY QUINN

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

16 Matthew, 25.

IT WAS the black year 1484. Spring—or rather the *vorfrüling*—the spring-before-the-spring—had come early to the Rhineland. It crept up the steep slopes in a green wave that broke into a froth of blossoms at the hilltops. Wild

Fear lay like a cold, miasmic fog across the countryside, the chill of it touched dweller in cot and castle, hall and town house.

plum and cherry trees swung their white boughs from the cliffsides and brambles bloomed in snowy drifts by trails and in old fields. Lower, on the forest floor, gooseberries dropped pale bells beneath the laurel and stout undergrowth. The vines put out new greenery and in the ordered orchards buds were bursting into lacelike daintiness. But in men's hearts a chill had gathered that mocked at nature's reawakening. Last year the crops had failed and in the crofts and hamlets starvation had been rife. Made bold by desperate hunger the wolf packs had come right down to the villages, and sheepfolds had been ravaged and their guardians killed almost in sight of home. Disease had taken its stark toll of man and child and woman, and robber companies marched and countermarched almost at will across the countryside, burning, pillaging and slaying without let or hindrance. Now to make the picture blacker, seemingly to snatch the last frayed shred of hope from the people, sorcery had spread like a plague from Aix to Magdeburg. Scarce a village but had its coven—twelve witches and a devil!—scarce a black, deserted heath there was that had not witnessed the abomination of the Black Mass.

And in the wake of sorcery another terror came, hardly less to be feared than the votaries of Satan. The witch-hunters. Headed by the Jacobin Inquisitor Jacobus Sprenger these minions of divine justice swept the countryside from Rhine to Elbe with a besom of steel and flame, and ruthlessly pursued with sword and hound the devil and his imps in the persons of such wretched creatures as they chose to take for their abodes.

The stake and rope were always busy and torturers were sweating at their grisly work from dawn to dark.

It had been bad enough when those accused of sorcery and witchcraft had been outcast old women, ne'er-do-well hangers-on at village markets and horse fairs, or even villeins and their womenfolk. But the holy hunters-down of evil had not stayed their hand at these. Prosperous crofters and franklins, stout burgesses and lordly merchants, doctors of the law and even priests in holy orders had been taken in the net.

The very Prince Bishop of Cahors had been denounced and flayed alive for dealings with the Evil One.

So fear lay like a cold miasmic fog across the countryside, the chill of it touched dweller in cot and castle, hall and town house, and brother scarce could dare to trust brother, or wife husband or child parent, lest he or she turn out to be a spy of Sprenger's, ready to go blabbing with denunciations to the black-robed judges who had set their courts up everywhere and who were never known to loose a prisoner, save to the tender mercies of the torturer and hangman.

BUT though the witch-hunters were busy from the banks of the Rhine to the Elbe, and the fires that roared and flamed around the stakes set up for sorcerers and witches seemed never to slacken, in the demesne of young Count Gustav von Ehrenstein and his gentle lady Heloise peace lay like a cool hand upon the hot brow of a fevered sufferer. No sorcerer had been denounced in the farm lands around the castle, in all the twelve villages appurtenant to the young graf's domain no screaming woman or bewildered man had been dragged off to durance and the stake by Sprenger's black-gowned myrmidons.

Perhaps this was because of their antecedents, perhaps because of the sanctity of their lives. Gustav had been a younger son, not destined for his father's lands and titles, and so at thirteen, unschooled in arts of war or venery, but lettered as few laymen were in that day, he had gone from

his father's house to seek admission as a novice in the monastery of Saint Michael the Puissant, where the abbot was a count in his own right and all the brethren sons of rich and noble families. He had progressed from postulant to novice and the abbot had designed a great career as a churchman for him when Fate stepped in and took direction of his life. His father, Gottfried Ehrenstein, twelfth baron of his line, had ridden to the Holy Wars in Palestine with Ludwig von Hohenheim, and when they had returned from fighting with the Turks had stopped some time at his castle. There they had made a pact and sworn it on the Rood that if kind heaven blessed them with offspring they should be wedded, whether it were a Hohenheim's son and Ehrenstein's daughter or the other way around, the eldest son of one should wed the eldest daughter of the other.

A score of years had sped since that pact had been made, and Providence had sent two daughters to Ludwig and two sons to Gottfried, so Sophia von Hohenheim had been affianced to Hugo von Ehrenstein before her eyes were opened to the daylight, and her younger sister Heloise was destined for the convent of Saint Lenor, for more than six generations the house of Hohenheim had furnished lady abbesses to that community of noblewomen pledged to religion.

So Gustav entered on his course of studies and became an adept with the quill and lettering-brush, while Heloise was almost ready for profession as a nun when Fate dropped a stitch in the pattern of their lives. Young Hugo had ridden to Castle Hohenheim to claim his bride, and the day before their nuptials were to be solemnized had gone with her and several gay companions for pleasuring upon the lake. They had been sailing but a scant half-hour when one of those quick, violent summer storms came up and whipped the quiet waters into sudden fury. Their little barge had less chance than a cockle in a whirlpool, and though Hugo was a strong swimmer he could not save his bride-elect, and chivalry forbade that he return without her, so deliberately he threw his arms up and sank with her in the raging waters.

Three days later the lake gave up its dead and in the chapel of the Hohenheims which had been decked for a wedding Pere Bonnevie the castle chaplain intoned requiems for two who had been wedded in the indissoluable bonds of death.

At the feast that followed the entombment, as the custom was in those days, Gottfried Ehrenstein and Ludwig Hohenheim sought to drown their sorrow in great draughts of Rhenish wine and the heavier, headier vintages from Greece and Cyprus and Iberia, so presently their senses fled and both of them stood up and struck hands, swearing through their tears and hiccoughs that in hell's despite, and heaven's, too, an Ehrenstein should wed a Hohenheim.

Then messengers were sent post-haste to the monastery of Saint Michael and the convent of Saint Lenor where the gentle Heloise was almost kneeling at the altar to pronounce her vows, bidding them lay off the wimple and the cassock and come to Castle Hohenheim to take vows of a different sort before another altar.

GUSTAV had been a lad of thirteen, Heloise a child of ten when they had heard the convent doors swing to between them and the world, and in the four years that had intervened—years of the most susceptible period of their lives — their thoughts had constantly been fixed upon religion and the life of the religious; she had been reared to look on veil and cloister as her end and aim in life, he had looked forward to the tonsure and the cassock as his portion. Now, brought thus suddenly from their retreats, they were like

people dragged from a cool, shadowed cave into the glaring brilliance of a sunlit noon. Physically they were man and woman, spiritually they were nun and friar, emotionally and by experience they were but children when they were brought to face each other in the great hall of the castle and jovially informed by their fathers that they should wed within the sennight.

Gustav looked at his bride-to-be with something like abhorrance. He had been well schooled in the narrowness of cloistral thought—woman was a tool and agent of the Evil One, by her came sin and death into the world, her feet took hold on hell and in the kisses of her mouth damnation lay. But even as he looked at her he felt misgivings. Could so much beauty be a thing of evil? The *Herr Gott* pleasured in the beautiful; might not this woman, lovely as a being from another, better, world, be His own handiwork, not for seduction of men's souls to sin, but for His own glorification?

Indeed, as she stood before him in the light of flaring cressets, she might have been a saint or angel from the bright illuminations of some precious missal. She had the pale, white, almost transparent skin that goes with red-gold hair and eyes of luminous greenish-violet. Her head was small and proudly held, as if in consciousness of noble blood, her lips were very red and full; sad lips, sweet lips, lips ripely soft and meant for kissing. Hers was a face of delicate and piquant loveliness, ivory-toned beneath the aureate brightness of her lamplit hair, and there was lyric grace in the pose of her long, lithe body.

Her gown of dark green shining silk had the stark simplicity of a single garment, clinging softly at the bosom and shoulders, rounded at the neck, long-sleeved with loose-cut cuffs that showed the lovely modeling of her slender wrists, and flowing with a rippling fullness to her feet. A girdle of gold-threaded cord was crossed above her waist, brought down to cross again about her slender hips, and tied in a loose knot with long ends at the front. Her copper-alloy hair was smoothly parted in the middle and bound with green silk ribbon in two braids as long and full as twin umbrella cases. Had she loosed it, he knew instinctively, it would have fallen well below her knees and shrouded her as in a veil. Her narrow feet were shod with pointed shoes of bright red velvet.

In her wide eyes there was the wondering, half-affrighted look of a startled child, and he had the almost eerie feeling he could see through them to some far, lighted place beyond. *"Mater purissima, refugium peccatorum,"* Gustav prayed devoutly, "grant that this be a showing of the Lord His love of beauty, not some snare set by the Prince of Evil, for if she be I never can resist her blandishments!"

"I bid thee very welcome to the Castle of Hohenheim, my lord," she greeted, and her low voice had the musically muted murmur of clear water flowing through a covered runnel. She held a slim, pale hand out to him and he raised it to his lips, nor could he see the slowly kindling light in her soft eyes as he laid lips to her frail, trembling fingers.

A more experienced woman might have found in Gustav Ehrenstein cause for accelerated pulses. To this girl who had not seen a man other than her confessor since her tenth year he was almost irresistible. His auburn hair was not cut in the current mode, for novices at Saint Michael's wore their hair close-cropped while they awaited tonsuring, but the very closeness of its cropping made it lie in small tight curls about his head and gave him the look of a page boy rather than a grown man. His doublet was of slashed brown satin laced with gold-tipped points, and matched his brown silk hose and soft brown leather

boots in shade. Beneath the doublet was a shirt of fine white linen and round his waist was girt a belt of gold-bossed soft brown leather to which a staghorn-handled dagger hung in a sheath of brown suede.

Gottfried Ehrenstein heaved a sigh of paternal pride as he looked at them. "By'r Larkin, Ludwig, meseems we did the race a favor when we snatched yon pair of turtles from the cloister!" he declared.

"Thou sayest truly, old friend," Hohenheim agreed. "My sword is at the throat of any man who says they will not make a goodly bridal couple. Meantime my mouth has gone as dry as hell's subcellar. What sayest to a pot o' wine, my oldling?"

IT WAS an odd courtship, that of this maid who since her birth had been vowed to virginity and this youth whose whole life had been centered on the thought of cloistral celibacy. When she laid her hand on his arm to walk in the pleasaunce or stroll along the battlements in the cool of the evening, her fingers would tremble and the hot blood race in a quick tide, suffusing throat and cheeks and brow in a blush of embarrassment that bordered on terror. And at the contact of her little hand he almost winced and felt his breath come fast and faster till the beating of his heart was almost more than he could bear.

Perhaps if they had had a longer time to adjust themselves to the world and each other following immurement in the cloister during adolescence, they would have come eventually to complete normalcy. But a week is a short time for two sensitive, frightened people to remake their life patterns and reconcile themselves to a state which they had never for a moment contemplated. Two cage-hatched and cage-reared song birds suddenly turned loose to fend for themselves in the wildwood could not have been more helpless or confused.

Stark tragedy might easily have been their portion. Each might have seen in the other the cause—however unwitting—of the frustration of his life-aims and ambitions. But she was a woman, sweet and young and beautiful, he was a comely youth with gentle manners and a sweet, appealing winsomeness that was almost childlike. They were powerfully attracted to each other, each yearned instinctively for the other, longed with a longing unexpressed to himself, for the pressure of the other's arms, the touch of lips on lips—and each was dreadfully afraid of the other.

From the excess of her fear she found the courage to arrive at a solution of their difficulty. "My lord," she asked him tremulously as they walked in the pleasaunce on the night before their wedding, "art thou familiar with the history of the good Saint Paul?"

"Aye," he answered almost abstractedly. The fear of marriage hag-rode him, the terror of what seemed to him almost the breaking of a vow of celibacy weighed on his conscience like a burden. "Aye, Lady Heloise, I know his history well."

"Hast"—sheer trepidation made her breath come fast and almost blurred her words to nothingness—"hast read the *Acti Pauli et Theclae?*"

"Aye," he returned again, a little frown of wonder furrowing his brow.

"Wouldst take me for thy Thecla and I took thee for my Paulus at our wedding on the morrow, sweet my lord?"

At her question all his fears and misgivings dissolved. The weight that had bowed down his heart and spirits was removed as the great stone was rollen from the Sepulchre by the cherubim. "Marry, dear my Lady Heloise, thou hast made me happiest of men," he answered and put her pale hands, one after the other, to his lips.

So in the castle chapel with the red re-

flection of the sanctus light upon their earnest upturned faces they knelt before the altar and vowed to take each other spiritually to spouse, to be like brother and sister through their life together, like the Apostle Paul and sweet Saint Thecla of Iconium who, according to the Apocryphal Gospel, had followed him from Antioch to Myra and Seleucia and shared his travail and his dangers and received his love, yet never was his bride in aught save spirit.

HIS father had been dead for twenty years and for a score of years the farmers and peasants had named Gustav and his lady in their prayers each night, and many went so far as to declare them already sainted. For on accession to the title and governance of the demesne of Ehrenstein Gustav abolished the old *droit du seigneur* whereby the lord had the right to occupy the bride-bed of his vassals; confirmed the rights of town dwellers to choose their magistrates by vote, and granted every farmer and chrofter all his land produced above a tax of one-tenth of the crops. Not only that, when drought or tempest spoiled the crops all taxes were remitted to the people that they might have seed corn for the next year's planting. So his tenants prospered in the midst of famine all around them, and the doom-tree, where aforetime corpses hung in chains continually for admonishment of evil-doers, bore scant fruit in Ehrenstein's domains, and when the plague of sorcery spread through the land, and in its wake the greater plague of witch-hunting sprang up, his people and his domain were immune to both.

It might be supposed such a state of affairs would have pleased the grand inquisitor, and that he would have held the Ehrenstein domain up as an example to the witch-plagued Rhineland, but the mind of a fanatic does not work like those of other men, and in the peace and quietude and prosperity of Ehrenstein Jacobus Sprenger and his helpers saw only the subtlety of the power of Satan. They who had heard confession after torture-wrung confession of dealings with the Evil One from persons theretofore held in esteem by all who knew them, knew only too well that the heart of man is vile and deceitful above all things, and that no witch or wizard had been denounced in the Ehrenstein demesne was much more cause for suspicion than thanksgiving to Jacobus Sprenger; so at Lammastide, when the feast of Saint Peter's Chains was celebrated and for reasons best known to themselves witches were especially active, Johannes Damhoulder rode into Ehrenstein with a copy of Sprenger's *Malleus Maleficarum* —the "Hammer for Witches"—under his arm, a hundred blank warrants in his saddle bags and a score of armed men clattering and clanking at his back.

He set up court and solemnly announced that he was ready to receive denunciations of all persons suspect of witchcraft or heresy. But August ripened to September, and September gave way to October, and none came forward to speak ill against his neighbor.

So, refusing to be made ridiculous this way, the learned Doctor sent his men-at-arms out into the by-ways, seized an aged woman bent almost double with rheumatism and haled her to the bar of justice where she was duly accused of witchcraft in that she had disinterred the body of a chrisom child from the churchyard "and took several pieces thereof, to wit, the hands and feet and a pairt of the legs and made thereof a py and eat thereof that by this meanes she might never make confession of her witchcraftis."

The aged prisoner protested innocence as loudly as her cracked voice would permit, but whether her "witchcraftis" were successful or whether natural causes inter-

vened is a moot question to this day. At any rate, she did not make confession of her evil-doings, for when they put her to the torment she died at the first turn of the thumbscrews, screaming a denial of all charges with her last despairing breath. So, since he had been deprived of the melancholy satisfaction of burning her alive the learned Doctor had her corpse burned and her ashes scattered to the autumn winds.

She was the first and only victim of his judging, for shortly after he had burned her he packed bag and baggage, learned book and fur-trimmed robe, and went back to Cologne where witches were more plentiful and one learned in the law of church and state might better put his talents to employment.

A heartfelt prayer of thanksgiving went up from every peasant's cot and townsman's house when Doctor Johann Damhoulder turned his back on Ehrenstein, but from the day of his departure neither Gustav nor Heloise was seen to smile.

They were no less kindly, no less gentle, no less loving toward each other and their people, but a sadness like the sadness of impending death lay on them both, and this, according to their legend, is the reason:

When news of Goodwife Baumer's death while undergoing the question came to Gustav he had been at his prayers in the chapel, and straightway he fell into a deep reverie, and hardly broke his brooding silence again that day. The castle horologe had sounded ten—a late hour in that day of early rising and still earlier retirement—when he rose from his bed, dressed himself in stealthy silence and crept out by the postern gate.

It was a still November night, cold and moonless, and the houses of the town that clustered round the castle hill turned dark and sightless windows on him as he strode through the narrow street toward the great heath that lay a league to the west. Once he had left the town his road was bordered on each side by tall fir trees that stretched unbrokenly away, solemn, black and brooding, holding up dark branches to the dark sky as if to draw down darker secrets from it. Occasionally something rustled in the undergrowth, and once or twice he heard an owl's quavering cry, but otherwise the night was silent as a graveyard, and the rustle of his footsteps on the fallen pine needles was like the accusation of his conscience as he hurried toward the tryst which he had set for himself.

AT LAST he reached the spreading, bramble-grown heath, and it took all his resolution to keep from crossing himself as he looked out across it. It spread before him like a plain, half veiled in a gray mist that rose from the marsh places, leprous-white, unearthly and utterly still. Then suddenly a little breeze sprang up, making the long skeins of fog-shroud waver like the cerements of unclean dead things dancing on their graves, and the moon rose slowly over the horizon, red and gigantic. A blood-red moon, red as the threat of fire and blood that hung over the Ehrenstein marshes.

He took fresh resolution at the sight, drew the small dagger from his girdle and let a little blood from his arm, breast and brow. "Lord of the world, most potent Messire Satanas, by all the wickedness men do, by all the crimes men hate and fear, I summon thee!" he called out in a firm voice.

A faint, yellowish cloud with tattered edges blew across the red disc of the moon, a strange and eerie dusk crept over the landscape, and far away, so far that he could scarcely hear it, the quavering, terror-ridden howl of a dog sounded, found its echo in another and another and another, till the whole still night was fairly trembling with the frightened, tremulous

ululations. Then toward him, walking slowly with bent shoulders, he saw a figure.

It was a tall man robed in colorless gray stuff, his hair and beard were white as shroud-linen, from his face, emaciated, drawn and hollowed as the features of a corpse, his eyes peered out of deep-sunk sockets. And they, like all the rest of him, were colorless, but hard and gleaming-bright as diamonds or icicles.

"Who calleth me?" the Stranger asked, and in his hollow tones the bottomless despair of one damned past hope of pardon sounded. "Who calls on Barran-Sathanas, the puissant Overlord of Hell?"

"I do," Count Gustav answered in a voice as firm as he could muster, for very terror sent swift ripples racing up his spine and fear as cold as death's own chill held his tongue in constraint. " 'Twas I who called thee by the letting of my blood, Great Sir."

"And what have I to do with thee, or thou with me, von Ehrenstein, thou leader of a blameless life?"

"I would make treaty with thee, Great Sir."

"Thou knowest that I drive hard bargains?"

"Aye, by'r Larkin, that do I, but my need is desperate, and the price I am prepared to pay is great."

"The price will be a great one, Ehrenstein. I would not treat with thee for a less guerdon than thy soul. Art thou prepared to pay so much?"

"I am, Messire. My soul is thine from everlasting unto everlasting if thou wilt pass my people by, release all those among them who are bound to thee by covenant, and take me and me only in lieu of all the souls who now dwell or shall come to dwell hereafter in my domain."

"Now that is overmuch to ask, meseems," the Stranger answered with another hollow laugh. "Thou art but one man, Gustav Ehrenstein, and for thy single soul thou asketh me to release all whom I have bound to me by covenant?"

"I do. Thou knowest well that such as I make rare game for thy bag, Great Sir. In all the knightly history of our house not one among the Ehrensteins there was who did not die in the odor of sanctity, yet here I stand and make thee willingly and without reserve the offer of myself, my body, soul and spirit."

The Stranger laughed again, and, "Be it so," he agreed. "Sign here, von Ehrenstein, the blood still drips from thy wounds. Dip the quill in it and sign thy name to the patent making thee my thing and chattel through all time and eternity." He drew a parchment from his gray robe and held a feather-pen out to Gustav.

The deed was signed, the Stranger gone again to his abode, and Gustav Ehrenstein walked slowly back to the castle. The blood-red moon had set before he cleared the fir forest and in the dense blackness of the night there was a sense of change. He knew that he could never smile again, that always there would be the sense of guilt upon him. He was not as other men. They had hope of heaven while they lived to make confession and atonement for their sins. He was hopelessly barred out from Paradise, irrevocably consigned to damnation.

THE Lady Heloise had wakened from a deep and dreamless sleep, coming slowly to full consciousness like one swimming up from deep water. She could not say at first if it had been a sound that wakened her; it could have been a sound or it might have been cessation of a sound—breathing, perhaps—that had been there before and was there no longer.

Idly she looked about the chamber, lit dimly by the small wick floating in its bowl of scented oil. It was a charming place. The walls were covered with écru brocade

embroidered with gold. Deer hide, almost golden in shade, was stretched on the floor, but only a small strip of it was visible close to the walls, for soft, bright-colored silken rugs lay all about, almost concealing the outline of the low plinth on which the broad low bedstead, spread with a coverlet of baby wolf skins, was set. She raised an arm and thrust it underneath the linen-covered pillow and the gesture threw her figure into relief, bringing out the charming, tender curves of it beneath the wolf-skin cover.

Now she knew what had awakened her. The regular low breathing of her husband did not sound beside her. She drew her hand from underneath the pillow, feeling for the form that should have lain beside her, but there was nothing under the fur blanket but the unsheathed sword that Gustav had laid between them on their bridal night and which had lain between them ever since, its cold, sharp steel a constant reminder of their vow to live in wedded celibacy, its cross-hilt signifying that their compact was registered in heaven.

"My lord!" she breathed, a little chill of apprehension stirring in her. "Where art thou, dear my lord?"

Despite the vow that kept them virgin though wedded their marriage had proved happy. There had been nothing of love in it at the start, for they had married at their fathers' command and against all personal inclination, but the inborn sweetness of their natures and their constant nearness to each other had brought first friendship, then affection, finally love of a sort more like that of a dear sister for her adored brother than a wife for her husband. There was no passion in it—their vow precluded that—yet the calm and ever-growing affection each had for the other made their union one of idyllic and consecrated love, so that each felt as if a part of him were gone when the other was absent. Their thoughts were one, their wishes almost identical, they even grew to look alike as if the same blood flowed in their veins and the same breast had nurtured them.

Now, for no reason she could name, she was afraid. Terribly afraid. "My lord!" she called again, then, more softly, "My dear and only joy in life, where art thou?"

There was no answer and she threw the wolfskin cover back, drew her fur-trimmed robe of crimson silk about her, and thrust her feet into the wadded slippers lying at the bedside. Her husband's baldric with the long sword knotted to it lay across a chair, but his cloak and hat and dagger-belt were missing, so were his velvet doublet and silk hose and shagreen boots.

A fevered, fierce compulsion she could not explain bid her put on her velvet gown and kid-skin shoes, drape her furred mantle over her shoulders and steal silently to the base court of the castle. She was just in time to see the postern gate close softly as she reached the courtyard and, silent-footed, scarcely daring to breathe aloud, she crept after the cloaked, furtive form that walked with bent shoulders toward the heath where legend said the witches had once held their revels and where those who sought him might evoke the Prince of Evil.

SILENTLY as a shadow she trailed Gustav to the moorland, trembled with sick apprehension as she saw him let his blood and speak the words of power to bring Satanas to him; fell almost swooning to her knees as he made treaty with the Evil One.

At last the compact had been signed and Gustav, bent and seeming an old man, turned back toward the castle. Then, waiting till the fir trees' shadow had engulfed him, Heloise crept out upon the moor, drew the bodkin-dagger from her coiled hair, and made a little wound in her left arm, her breast and her brow. With clenched teeth she felt the welter of warm blood against her garments, and:

"Satanas!" she called tremulously.

"Lucifer, Beelzebub, Asmodeus, Abaddon, by whatever fell name thou'rt known, I bid thee come to me, and that right quickly!"

She waited for a silent, breathless moment. Then in the distance a dog howled. The sound was slender as a spider-web, but at it she felt everything go cold within her, and everything around her seemed unreal and unsubstantial, as though she stood upon a cloud instead of solid earth, and cold, wet mist swirled round her, shutting off her sight and breath and hearing.

Once more she saw the gray-draped Stranger moving slowly toward her in moonlight, again she felt the nauseating weakness coming over her, but she withstood it and held out trembling hands, palm-upward. "Great Sir, I crave a boon!" she whispered tremulously, for her heart beat so that she could hardly speak.

The Stranger laughed an almost silent hollow laugh, and its sound chilled her like a breath of icy wind. "I grant no boons," he answered in that dreadful, empty voice. "All that I part with must be paid for, and with usury. What seekest thou, Heloise von Ehrenstein, and what canst offer as a *quid pro quo?*"

"I put myself in pledge for him, Great Sir. Take me instead of him; let me be thine in his place!"

"Thou knowest what that means? That when I come to take my pay thou'lt be consigned to everlasting torment, that when my fiends have flayed the shrinking skin from off thy shrieking body they'll roast thee in the fire that quencheth not from everlasting unto everlasting?"

"I know it full well, Great Sir."

"And thou'lt endure this torment to the end of time and all eternity for him?"

"Even so, my lord."

"On thy head be it, then. Stretch forth thy hand and sign the deed of covenant."

"Nay, not so fast, Sir Fiend. First tear the charter of my Gustav's vendure to thee up."

"Ah-ha, a woman come to justice! A quibbling lawyeress! Be it so, but a thousand thousand years of added torment shall be thine for this insolence, my Lady Heloise."

He drew the parchment Gustav had signed from his wallet, tore it into shreds and scattered them to the night air. "Art satisfied?" He held another engrossed deed out to her and she signed her soul away in her own blood.

THE witch-hunts died out slowly in the Rhineland. Not from any lack of zeal on the part of the inquisitors, but because the Emperor interfered. The executions were in a fair way to depopulate the land. The people had grown tired of the bloody farce and the Emperor apprehensive, for, since the judges and accusers shared the property of those condemned for witchcraft between them, and since more and more wealthy persons had been consigned to the stake, the imperial revenues were menaced. So the judges packed their books and parchments in their stuff bags and went westward into the French lands where there would be less interference from the people or the crown.

By the standards of their time Gustav and Heloise were old, for the average span of life in those days was but little more than twenty years, and they were more than twice that. And yet, perhaps because of their calm, ordered life, perhaps because of the tranquillity of spirit which they had from each other's company and love, they did not seem to age. There was no powdering of gray in Gustav's auburn hair, no network of fine wrinkles showed around the corners of his lady's eyes. Only a fixed melancholy, a sort of sadness more like resignation than despair, had settled on them both, and this had the effect of making them more tender toward each other, more charitable toward their tenants and vassals, more generous to the poor who

thronged the castle almony for the weekly dole of loaves and wine. Sometimes, when he thought she did not watch him, Heloise would see Gustav sitting like one dead in his carved chair, his hands clasped idly in his lap, all thought and feeling gone from his face, a vacant-eyed, all but unconscious simulacrum of a man. Then he would feel her looking at him and turn suddenly to find her luminously greenish-violet eyes on him abrim with tears of tenderness.

At times like that their glances met and clung like lovers in an embrace and in their gaze were mingled pain and love and sorrow—and renunciation impassable as a barrier of flashing swords.

IT WAS on Christmas Eve their time for payment came. They had attended Mass in the chapel and, silent and abstracted, gone to their chamber. Upon the morrow bells would be achime to usher in the blessed day, but Gustav knew that all the mercy promised to mankind by Heaven on the first Noël was not for one who had forsworn his birthright as a child of grace, and Heloise knew with a tragic tightening of her heartstrings that the hope of clemency was hers no more since she had signed her covenant with Satan.

A little sigh, half-moan, half-ragged sob, pushed past her lips as she unloosed the gleaming wealth of her long hair. As she stood before her polished-silver mirror with the ivory comb poised in her hand the torrent of her loosened tresses all but touched the floor.

To Gustav she seemed more lovely than he had ever seen her, and as she turned her sadly tender eyes on him he felt as if the heart from his breast flowed to her as if it were a tangible warm current of love. "My dear"—emotion made him almost inarticulate—"my very dearest, art thou sad, and at the blessed Christmastide? Nay, be not so, I do entreat thee, for on this day was born the One in whom mankind hath hope—"

A sob of penitence and sorrow split his words, and found its echo in the moaning cry, like that of a hurt animal, she gave as she dropped to the floor and let the veil of her loosed hair round her face. "Oh, say not so, my lord, my life, my love!" she besought. "For me there is no hope, no redemption, no salvation—"

And then the Stranger stood in the room with them, and they felt a chill as cold as death's own self come in the air.

"Gustav von Ehrenstein"—the Stranger's diamond-hard, frost-bright eyes looked straight into the count's heart—"I am here to claim the forfeit of my bond. Thy people have been safe from persecution, the witch-hunters have gone their ways. Say, have I not fulfilled my bargain?"

"Thou hast, Great Sir," Gustav responded dully. "Thou hast fulfilled it to the smallest tittle, and I am ready to make payment."

"Thou hast no regrets? Thou wouldst not beg a softening of the condition?"

Gustav drew himself up proudly. "Did I ask aught of thee except the saving of my people's souls and bodies, Messire? Thou hast made good thy promise. Come, let us bandy no more words. I am ready."

But Heloise was on her feet and stood between the Stranger and Gustav, her face flushed with anger and her eyes aflame with fury like those of a she-wolf when her cubs are menaced. "*Retro Satanas*—back, Satan! 'Twas I you covenanted to accept in the place of my dear lord. My soul you bought in lieu of his, my bond was signed in place of that which was torn up. I hold thee to thy bargain, Barran-Sathanas—my life for his, my body and my spirit in his stead, my soul's salvation for his freedom!"

A slow soft laugh as terrifying as an adder's hiss crawled from the Stranger's mouth. "Had thought to spare thee, Mis-

tress, but sith thou'lt not have it so, I will accept thy substitution. Art ready to fare forth with me to everlasting torment?"

"Aye, that I be, Great Sir, and right willingly, too, but of thy sweetest charity grant me one boon."

"Thou durst ask charity of *me?*"

"I do, Great Sir, nor do I think that even thy hard heart can say me nay—"

"What is it, then, my prizeling?"

"That I may have one little minute by the castle horologe to bid my dearest lord farewell and tell him how much I love him—"

"Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend. How much greater is the love that forfeits life eternal for another?"

The tones were not the hard, cold voice of the Stranger, they were as warm and gentle as May sunshine, and when Gustav and Heloise turned from their frenzied embrace to him who spoke they saw instead of the gray-garmented demon a form encased in living light from whom a nimbus as of rainbow colors spread, and whose face—

IT WAS the face they'd seen in painted windows of the great cathedral churches, beautiful with manly beauty transfigured by heavenly power, yet with a woman's tenderness in it. And the sweet dark smell of pine and cedar, fir and balsom filled the chamber and a sound like angel voices singing in the Christmas sky poured golden music over everything.

"Der Herr!" cried Gustav, sinking to his knees and clasping his hands in mute adoration.

"O Lord and Master," faltered Heloise as she put her head to the floor, "we are not worthy thou shouldst come to us—"

"Peace, children," said the calm voice, sweeter than the sweetest music. "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it, but whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. Because thou thought it pleasing in my sight thou hast abstained from profane love, but forasmuch as thou were willing to give up thy souls for others thou shalt not die sterile. Go, seek what is thine own in the chapel."

Then the vision faded slowly from their wondering sight, but the sweet perfumes of evergreens remained, and in the air there were the echoes of the angels' choir.

So presently, hand clasped in hand, they went all silently to the deserted chapel, and there before the altar was a *crèche* and in it lay a new-born infant wrapped in swaddling bands. A chubby little boy-child, not red and wrinkled as most twenty-minutes-old babies, but white of skin and pink of lip, with a tiny fuzz of auburn hair upon his head and eyes of luminous bright violet-green.

"My lord, my dearest lord, he has thy hair and nose!" cried Heloise ecstatically, as mothers have said to their husbands since the world began.

"Nay, sweet, my hair and nose he may have, to his great misfortune," replied Gustav, "but his bonnie eyes are thine, and no one's else."

The infant puckered up his roseleaf lips and waved his chubby arms at them, and Heloise bent quickly, took him from the wattled crib in which he lay and cuddled him against her.

Small hands were fumbling at her velvet gown, a little head was pressing at her bosom, and, instinctively, not realizing what she did, she unfastened the lacings of her bodice.

And as the warm pink lips pressed to her breast the wellsprings of her heart were loosed, and milk came forth.

The baby nursed with little sleepy clucking sounds of pure content, and Heloise turned star-bright eyes to Gustav. The eyes of a Madonna. Eyes full of satisfied desire; the eyes of a woman who has attained the greatest goal in the world.

Lover of Caladiums

By MARIA MORAVSKY

A TALE OF MURDER AND MONSTROUSNESS

ARTHUR FOKIN bent over his greenhouse bench filled with fancy caladiums. They were beautiful, especially to his jaded taste used to the everblooming Florida flowers. Those chaste, wide-leaved plants which never gave birth to common blooms, had a sterilized useless charm. Deep green with crimson streaks, or yellow and white spots, they made him think of some barren, outlandish jungle animals with brilliantly spotted green fur. Some were like colorful fans, others, with still spiraled young leaves, suggested uncoiling snakes. They had secret life of their own, far more interesting than mere plant growth, so his Brazilian gardener told him. They rose in the dense jungles below the Equator, out of the vapors of wild tribesmen's blood, spilled in mortal combat.

"They're covered with war paint," Domenico had explained.

They looked it. The superstitious old gardener believed that caladiums could suck in the last dying breath of the warriors who fell between them. According to Domenico, caladiums had souls. Savage, weird souls, inherited or rather stolen from the dying in the moment when the tribesmen's wounded bodies fell in battle.

It all made good sales talk, when Arthur tried to sell some surplus plants, to buy new, more rare ones. Caladiums were his hobby, and it proved to be a rather expensive one. The plants were too frail for this world, he often remarked, smiling whimsically, his short military moustache bristling over his full, dark red lips. Even the gentle Florida winter was too much for these children of the Equator. They would lose their leaves, unless greenhouses were adequately heated, and filled with moist vapors, reproducing as closely as possible their natural habitat of steaming jungles.

Caladiums ate money, and did not sell well. Besides, Arthur Fokin was not interested in any small-time selling campaign. He was much more open to the proposition of wholesale selling—of his soul.

No, don't misunderstand. He was not that superstitious. He knew that there were no demon buyers on Miami Beach. But one could sell the charm of one's soulful personality to a pretty rich widow, or a divorcee, for that matter.

He tried it, twice. Both times he discovered that the prospects were not worth his efforts. After he wormed out of them all the cash money they were willing to part with, he discovered that there were no further funds. So, to put a lasting end to those dragging and palling affairs, he disposed of both women, almost simultaneously. He literally threw them to his caladiums.

It was simple.—A twisted silk handker-

It was simple. A twisted silk handkerchief . . . and the rest dovetailed nicely with his gardening activities!

chief. The rest dovetailed itself nicely with his gardening activities. Even now, he ordered Domenico:

"As soon as you're through transplanting the lily bulbs, go to Kilgore chemists and get some of that acid, to speed up our pile of compost."

"Bueno," Domenico nodded with secretive smile. A fugitive from a chain gang, alone in a strange country, he could not very well inquire why his generous master needed so much acid to speed the disintegration of organic matter. The organic matter which had at times the odor of putrid flesh.

AFTER those two disposed of affairs, Fokin's caladiums throve as never before. Their leaves grew glossy, like hides of well-fed animals. Strange sports appeared among the familiar plants. Different patterns zigzagged on the freshly unfurled leaves, in turquoise and lavender. It occurred to Arthur that these were the colors his visitors used to wear, just before ——. But he squelched the superstitious imaginings.

He could not give heed to the natives' childish tales, especially now that he needed all his *sang froid*. Steady nerves paid dividends, especially when one had to apply a twisted silk handkerchief to make sure. Another annoying affair had recently begun to pall on him. Madame Savita, twice married opera singer, was here in search of Florida easy divorce. In the meantime, she amused herself, until she fell in love with Fokin, who was ten years her junior.

Again he overestimated his amanuensis' wealth. He was too impractical, he told himself. Anartistic soul, given to the love of the beautiful in nature, like his caladiums, for instance, could not dwell on those sordid details of illusory fortunes. How was he to know that the lady just tried to save appearances, dazzling the fashionable Beach colony with her receptions? He knew about her fabulous salary, but did not reckon with her former husband's prodigious spending ability. Nothing was left for himself, literally nothing. If he ever married her, he would have to support her. No, that was out of the question. Why he had not enough money even to support his caladiums. And they spread so. Just now they needed a new greenhouse.

That evening, he expected a visit from Madame Savita. The sentimental aging fool probably called it a tryst. He laughed savagely when he remembered her words:

"You must show me your collection of caladiums . . ."

At her age, too! As if a woman of the world did not know that bachelors' collections were excellent excuses for imprudent heavy dates.

Well, he hoped that Domenico would purchase the acid on time.

When Madame Savita invaded his greenhouse, with her false curls, syrupy smiles, rustle of silk, and funereal tuberose perfume, he was annoyed and irritated. Why it was worse than thinning his plants, and he hated to pull them out and soil his hands. He could not entrust this to Domenico, the gardener had no sense of proportion. He would throw out some valuable specimen and keep the easiest grown ones, perhaps out of sheer laziness. No, if one had an important job to do, it had to be done personally, no matter how unpleasant.

After they had examined the caladiums, they went to his screened bower, heavily twined with heavy vines, the romantic bower which stood in the remote corner of the garden. No cries could be heard from there—

He offered her wine. The bower was furnished with a lounge, strewn with silken pillows as colorful as his caladiums. After she drank the sweetly-scented and strangely-tasting concoction which he called the

wine of dreams, she reclined on those pillows, ready for the real beginning of a delightful evening, and not realizing that it was the end.

Soon she fell asleep, her mouth gaping, the triple string of pearls rising and falling rythmically on her heavy bosom.

The twisted handkerchief was used for the third time—

AT FIRST everything seemed to dovetail perfectly. Domenico was on time with the acid. The pile of compost at the end of the garden close to the bower bulged strangely, for a short time. Then—it grew, mixed with sand, and soon it was ready to feed the caladiums. Every gardener knows that caladiums are heavy eaters.

They relished the fertilizer so generously applied to them. Another sport* appeared among the variegated new sprouts. This time it was bronze-red, like a woman's hennaed tresses. They looked hairy, too, those new caladium leaves, still half-spiraled like rolled manuscripts of colored papyrus. And this time, the leaves developed a scent. Arthur wondered . . . His caladiums never had fragrance, before.

For hours at a time, he stayed in his greenhouse, admiring them, until a fearful, annoying interruption gave his nerves a severe jolt: the police came to investigate the sudden disappearance of Madame Savita.

Oh, he was a fool, an impractical fool! He had not taken into consideration that an opera star had contracts to fulfill, and so her time was accurately budgeted. It appeared that Madame Savita was supposed to be in New York on a certain date.

"What do you know about her?" Sergeant McCrory questioned him in Arthur's own luxurious study, gulping his best liqueurs as if they were common whiskey. "You and Madame were as thick as thieves. Where is she?"

Arthur shrugged his padded shoulders.

"She—she told me she was flying to Brazil, as soon as the hot weather settled here," he improvised on the spur of the moment.

"How come? Isn't Brazil still hotter than Miami Beach?"

"Yes, but you see, when we have summer, it's winter down there," Arthur explained, pained by the man's gross ignorance. To illustrate his explanation, he pointed to a globe standing on the desk of his study.

As he did so, his finger struck Brazil. Not the coastal line, which was quite clear, but the sketchily explored interior, those steaming jungles whence his caladiums came. And as he did so, a strange smear appeared on the tip of his finger. A hot, greenish smear, strangely scented, like his newest caladium plant.

"Well, I don't know what to do with you gigolos," Sergeant McCrory said with brutal frankness. "You milk a dame dry, and then—she's gone. Ashamed of herself, I guess, or secluded in some cheap spot, where she can recoup after her mad spending. That's a familiar procedure, but just the same, I wish you'd give me her address. No, no charges against you. That's her own fool affair. We just want her safe. Her life safe, I mean."

The last remark gave Arthur shivers. Could the sergeant suspect?

After McCrory left, Arthur could not sleep that night. The unexpected visit bothered him. His vivid imagination grew morbid.

"I'll go and look at my caladiums. Their beauty will soothe my nerves," he said to himself, admiring his own sensitivity to nature's beauty.

But the caladiums did not look beautiful under the moon that shone on them through the shatterproof lucite roof of the greenhouse. Their wonderful red and yel-

*Note: A "sport" is a term in botany meaning a bud variation.

low markings did not show well on the dark green. The night, subduing all colors, made the leaves appear just soiled dark. Like tattered clothes, used too often, the leaves hung on bent stems seeming to spell a reversed saying: "from riches to rags." Rich in the daytime, beggars at night, that's what his prized caladiums were. Beggars, even as himself. He would be the lowest of beggars soon, if he did not sell that triple string of pearls. And yet, pressed as he was for money, he hesitated to entrust Domenico with selling the jewels, stolen from the murdered woman.

He took the pearls out of his secret belt pocket and looked at them gleaming in the moonlight. His good mood began to return. He even pirouetted twice on the crowded tiled floor of his nursery.

Suddenly his heel caught at a broken pot. He stumbled and fell headlong into a bed of tender young plants, crushing them.

He was not hurt badly, but, being a hypochondriac, he forgot everything for the moment, except the possible infection in his superficial cuts. He ran into the house, to his luxurious bathroom, grabbed a bottle of mercurochrome out of the medicine cabinet, and smeared it lavishly over his cut forehead.

In the strong, fluorescent light of the bathroom, the antiseptic on his skin looked like blood. "The mark of Cain," the hackneyed expression came into his mind, apropos of nothing. Just a trick of reflective memory, yet it disturbed him.

"I didn't kill any kin of mine. Only a useless, foolish woman," he defended himself against himself.

"Several foolish women," his usually docile conscience reminded him ironically.

He had a well-trained conscience, yet it was capable of occasional revolt. That morning, at breakfast, it clamored,—of all things,—for a confession.

"I won't do it. I won't! The sergeant won't bother me again. I'd be a fool—"

BUT Sergeant McCrory did bother him, that very morning.

Stifling his apprehension, Arthur invited the man to share his griddle cakes and coffee. McCrory loosened his belt a bit, and accepted. He seemed to enjoy the hospitality, and never mentioned the nature of his business, until the dishes were cleared away.

"Now, about those pearls—" he began with a sigh. It wasn't easy to question a suspect who had just fed you.

"What pearls?" Arthur asked with a fair show of sincere ignorance.

"Sorry, my good fellow, I meant it just as a routine visit. But, I happened to pass through your caladium house. I saw the string of pearls hanging on a plant."

Arthur gasped inwardly. In his hypochondriac concern about his slight wounds, he had forgotten all about those confounded pearls. He must have dropped them when he had fallen.

His mind raced like a squirrel in its cage wheel, uselessly, reviewing all that had lead to this. They could not arrest him for murder, there was no *corpus delicti*. But he could be booked on the charge of theft. Darn those pearls!

Suddenly he hated his caladiums. It was they who had tripped him. It was that new, hennaed-bronze plant—

Superstition stirred, and showed its gargantuan head. The breath-suckers. The stealers of souls. Even as he was strangling Madame Savita, they were watching. Her soul must have lived in that new sport plant. It was she who had tripped him, to recover her pearls.

As if to confirm this preposterous imagining, the policeman was saying:

"I declare, those plants of yours grow huge. The beads were tangled around a stalk as thick as a human neck. If it were not—"

"I didn't do it! I didn't appropriate those pearls!" Arthur heard himself

screaming at the top of his lungs. "How dare you!"

"Quiet, quiet, old man. I said nothing of the kind. Of course, a clever fellow like you wouldn't rob any dame of cheap imitation jewelry. I never meant—" the sergeant seemed to be genuinely pained for being misunderstood. "I never made a false arrest yet, and I don't intend to do it this time. I just thought that she might have given them to you to remember her by, you know. Or just dropped them here on her last visit. And—confess, now, she was here recently, the trinket still smells of perfume— Where is she? Her theatrical agent is worried."

Arthur heaved a sigh of relief and anger at the same time. So he had been a sucker again. Even her pearls were false. However, it was lucky that they were fakes. It eliminated the danger of an immediate arrest.

But the feeling of relief was momentary. The sergeant was too good a manhunter to risk the offense of false arrest. He must be painstakingly gathering additional proof. Well, he would fool the old police dog. He would fly to Brazil, before the net closed over his head. He had influence at Pan. Am., and would secure a berth secretly.

After he parted with his unwelcome guest, both simulating dubious cordiality, he went to one of his friends at the airways town office. A few confidential remarks, a vague promise of a big favor, and the matter was settled. He was given a preferred berth, although the ships were crowded; someone else's passage was cancelled.

He went home, exulting in his influence. Miami's Pan. Am. manager boasted about the hundred per cent honesty of his employees. Bah, it was to laugh. Still, what he did not know wouldn't hurt him. What is one preferred passenger on hundreds of trips?

He was ready and packed for his airtrip next morning. Domenico had received his instructions about caring for the caladiums, which were again in their owner's favor. He even went into the greenhouse, to say good-by to them.

But the good-byes proved to be premature. He was not through with his breakfast cereal, when the telephone rang. It was his friend, the airport official. He was exceedingly sorry, but weather conditions in the South Atlantic necessitated taking on more gas, and so—

ARTHUR grew cold all over. The damn rascal repented. He just tried to tell him in the airmen's jargon that his passage would be cancelled, too.

"It's first come, first served," the man explained regretfully. "More gas means less passengers. We have already checked off the list several others, before we came to your name. Sorry, old man. Will oblige you next time." Abruptly he hung up.

"There will be no next time," the murderer thought with clammy dread. He had missed his chance. Whether or not the other man's conscience had prevented his escape this morning, he was grounded, forced to wait. And in the meantime, McCrory might learn more incriminating details.

He could not finish his breakfast. Listlessly, he ordered Domenico to scout for a passage on an oceanic liner. He wondered if that would be of any use,—the police might be watching all steamers. Still, one had to try.

As always during emotional upsets, he went to look over his caladiums.

This time they were not nerve-soothing, either. The sun shone brightly, and the colors were vividly beautiful. But it was a savage kind of beauty. The crimson-spotted leaves seemed to be spattered with blood, and the hennaed bronze sport shone

as if covered with oily scum. Arthur did not like his plants that day.

"I'll see them at sunset, when they are at their prettiest," he promised himself, trying to overcome the curious revulsion and fear that the plants awakened in him lately.

TO HIS relieved surprise, Domenico returned with good news. Yes, he had secured passage on S.S. *Empress of the Orient,* and there were no snoopers around, as far as he could see. Did the master require any additional luggage? One did not need to travel as lightly on a ship as on a plane.

"Don't instruct me, you dolt," Arthur scowled. As if he did not know how to travel! He, who had paid the passage of many a pretty lady to South America.

When the garish tropical sunset came, painting the roof of his greenhouse with liquid purple, Arthur went into the plant house again, drawn to his caladiums by a force stronger than mere hobby.

The murderer had forgotten nothing. Every nauseous detail stood out vividly in his memory as if lit by the garish sunset. No, it was not sunset any longer, it was now one of those weird, fantastically beautiful tropical afterglows.

The colors of the sky, those opalescent rainbows coming through the translucent plastic of the greenhouse roof, doubled the changeable beauty of the caladiums. They now shone, as if with triumphant life of their own. Not mere plant life, but something akin to moving, human existence. The colors vibrated so strongly, that for a moment Arthur had to close his eyes.

When he opened them again, the scene was different. The plants had changed their positions.

Arthur rubbed his eyes, and looked at them again. Now the plants seemed to grow visibly. New, multiple leaves unfurling. Some plants stood upright, though, their leaves straight, vigilant, like dark jungle warriors, covered with war paint.

War paint! He remembered Domenico's smile. Arthur gave up. If his imagination so willed, let it play. Yes, these were the savages of Brazil, dancing with the three ladies he had killed. And one of them, the bronze-haired one, nearest to him, had a triple string of pearls around her dusky throat.

One moment more, and she came close. So close that her dotted silk gown brushed his skin.

He recoiled, shudderig. For, although the gown was beautiful and intact, her face was eaten by acid.

Playfully she lifted her pearls with her fingers, the shreds of half-disintegrated flesh hanging from them. Then, ever so slowly, she took the necklace off and with dreadful playfulness wound it around his neck.

WHEN Sergeant McCrory came in the morning to Arthur's estate, to arrest him for murder, Domenico led him into the greenhouse.

"I never touched anything, Serge," he said with the glib assurance of one who knows the ways of the police." Everything is just as I found it. You can see for yourself. No fingerprints, nor anything—"

"You talk too much," McCrory rebuked him. "How can you jabber so when your master is dead?"

Among the half-broken, grotesquely twisted plants of caladiums, Arthur's body lay in the awkward, stiff pose of sudden death. Huge, spotted leaves covered him up to his neck, like so many colored petticoats. But his face was above them, forever gasping for breath.

The Crowd

By RAY BRADBURY

Ever noticed at an accident the crowd that comes so fast, to form a circle? A circle, like a ring of . . . vultures?

AFTER the accident, the crowd gathered swiftly. A ring of faces looking down at Spallner, stirring, shifting, gaping. Where they all came from, he did not know. He had heard their hard heels clattering over the asphalt of the street, heard their shouts and tiny squeals and curses as they saw the new motor car crumpled against the brick wall.

Blood was trickling from a gash on his

brow. It swam across his face and he had trouble breathing. And yet he was strangely calm. He couldn't understand why.

He should be afraid of dying, but death was farthest from his thoughts. He was looking at the crowd that bent over him; a good two dozen people, jammed one in back of the other, looking down, looking down.

There was something in the expression on their faces. He could tell that he wouldn't die.

He could tell by their expressions . . .

Someone, far back, said, "Is he dead?"

Someone else replied, "No. He's not dead. He's not going to die. He'll be all right."

Naturally. Of course he wasn't going to die. They wouldn't let him. He could read it in their faces, that he would be all right.

The wheels of the car, turned up to the sky, were still spinning dizzily. He heard them whirring, slowing. There was something about the wheels, too. Something.

Gasoline crawled on the asphalt, mixed with blood. Feet moved.

"All right; break it up in there, break it up!" A thick Irish voice shouted its way through the crowd. Blue-serge legs appeared. A red Irish face peered down. "You okay, son?"

Spallner nodded his head weakly. "I'll —I'll be all right." A swallowing pause. "Ambulance?"

"Be here any minute now. You just take it easy."

Spallner did take it easy. He rested back against a coat somebody had thoughtfully slipped under his head. He had time to listen and look and smell.

He looked at the faces. A cordon of questioning, shifting faces. What sort of people were they, where were they from, what did they do?

HE EXAMINED each one. First, a man's face; thin, bright, alert and pale, staring at him; continually swallowing and wetting his lips as if he were hypnotized.

Beside him stood a small-boned woman with red hair and too much powder on her face. She was a calcimined wren with a high, hysterical voice. She wrung a handkerchief with her thin fingers.

Behind the officer, a little boy with freckles wavered. Tears streamed down his ruddy cheeks. He was barefooted, his eyes were scrouged up tight and he kept opening them and blinking them and closing them again.

A siren split the night wide open at the seams. The crowd craned its neck, as if it were all on a marionette string, activated by one silent will.

A sort of fear raced through Spallner then. The crowd twisted back, to gaze at him. Faces. There was something suggestive about them. Something he could not quite catch with his mind.

What was it. . . ?

Other faces. An old man with a face like a bleached apricot, bald and whimpering in his throat. A young woman whose hands were twitching all by themselves at her sides, as if they did not belong to her. A high school student, pimple-faced, who kept drawing back from the blood, but who always returned, curious, to look again. He couldn't help himself.

Where had they all come from?

So strange, thought Spallner, how a crowd gathers after an accident. Instantly, with the speed of Mercury, they materialized; young, old, glib and sour and frightened and calm. They came running for blocks, out of side-streets and out of alleys and out of houses and hotels and out of cabs and street cars and busses. They came quickly. It was impossible that so

many people could gather in one place at once.

They came as to the call of Gabriel.

The ambulance shrieked up, and the siren bubbled to a moan, then into silence. White uniforms took the plunge into the throng, wedged a trail through with a carrier.

"What is it?"

The officer told them. The crowd watched and listened. Effectively, the internes shifted Spallner onto the carrier, hoisted him and slid him into the ambulance.

One of the internes hopped in, slammed the doors shut. Through the square glass windows a few faces of the crowd still stared.

There was something wrong with the crowd. Something far worse than what had happened to Spallner. He felt uneasiness in his stomach.

Engines roared to life. The ambulance started. It pulled away from the curb, from the crumpled wreck, the blood and gas, away from the crowd.

The crowd that always came so fast. So strangely fast. To form a circle. A circle; like a ring of—

Vultures . . . ?

Blackness enveloped Spallner. It clipped off everything.

HE SAW the wheel spinning in his brain as he came to his senses. One wheel. Four wheels. Spinning, spinning and whirring with a relentlessly whining song. Around and around and around again.

He knew it was wrong. Something wrong with the wheels or the whole scene and setup. A vague wrongness which he could not quite fathom. But the auto wheels spun, his brain spun with them, and faces, the faces of the crowd, hurtled in mad dervish fashion at the core of the wheels.

Out of the spiraling nebula came sunlight, a doctor, his voice, his quiet, gentle face and a thin warm hand taking Spallner's pulse.

Things cleared into crystal sharpness. Spallner discovered the hospital room, with its exact germicidal odor, and a nurse standing behind the doctor.

"There you are," said the doctor as Spallner's eyes fluttered open. "How do you feel?"

The wheels had rolled away, taking the crowd and the nausea with them.

Spallner tried a weak smile. "Fine—I guess." His head was bandaged. Everything else was intact, under cover.

"I'm Doctor Melchior."

"Something's wrong, Doctor. Something's wrong—"

"I should say so. The accident—"

"No, no. I'm trying to think." Spallner lifted himself from the pillow, only to be gently pressed back by Melchior's hands.

"You can think just as well lying down, Mr. Spallner. Now, tell me what's wrong. Something about the accident?"

"In a way. Something about a wheel and a crowd." Spallner shook his head and winced. "Ah, don't mind me, I'm crazy." He bit his lips and looked at the physician. "If I tell you something, will you promise not to commit me to an insane asylum?"

"I promise. What is it?"

Spallner had to force it out, and he seemed embarrassed. "It was the crowd, Doctor Melchior. The crowd last night—I—I didn't *like* it."

Days of sunshine followed. Five of them. Doctor Melchior told him his stay at the hospital was almost over.

"You're lucky, Mr. Spallner. If that gash on your brow had been an eighth of an inch deeper—"

"There's something I'd like to know. Accidents do things to people, don't they?"

"What sort of things?"

"Up here," replied Spallner. He touched his head. "Doesn't it wreck your time sense?"

"Sometimes. It all depends."

"One minute seems like an hour or maybe an hour seems like a minute. Right?"

The physician nodded. "Panic often does that."

"Well—here's how it was. I was driving down a perfectly deserted street. Hitting about sixty. And then the blow-out. I jumped the curb, hit the wall. It was pretty awful. I was shocked, I know, but I still remember lots of things. Mostly, the crowd.

"It got there too *quick*, Doctor. The crowd got there too quick. About thirty seconds after the smash they were all there, standing over me and staring at me. . . . It's not right they should have run that fast, so late at night. . . "

CLEARING his throat, Melchior raised his hand. "You can answer your own problem. Your senses, temporarily warped, also threw a bend into time. What you thought was twenty seconds, was, in reality maybe five or six minutes. That's a normal time for a crowd to gather."

Spallner fell silent. In his mind he saw the crowd again. And—and the wheels—all of them—spinning around. He jerked.

"Doctor, I've got it. I know! It's impossible to twist the order of things completely if I was conscious all the way through! And I *was!* I remember; the wheels of the car. They were still spinning when the crowd got there. They were still spinning!"

Melchior said nothing, but frowned.

"I'm positive of that!" exclaimed Spallner. "The wheels were spinning, and spinning fast! You know yourself that the wheels of a car at a certain angle won't spin fast for a very long time. Friction'd cut it down immediately.

"That's what it is, I swear it. I saw them bending over me and then I heard the wheels singing around and around. I looked and saw them!"

The physician rose quietly and stood over his patient. "I've seen patients like you before. You're reshuffling your memories to fit a pattern you thought up. You want them to fit the pattern, and they do. You need a few more sedatives, young man. And, later, when you get out of the hospital, try a visit to a psychiatrist. He'll help you weed out your mind—"

"The street was empty, Doctor Melchior. Not a soul in sight. And there's one other thing. It was the look on the crowd's faces. Something that told me I wouldn't die. . . ."

"You're suffering from shock," said Melchior.

RELEASED from the hospital, the first thing Spallner did was call a taxi.

"I'm recovering from an accident," he told the driver. "If I don't ride now, and ride fast, I'll never drive again. Take me home at nothing under forty."

He climbed into the taxi and they were off. He was afraid at first. Calmness and confidence returned slowly as they hurtled homeward, and he finally began to worry, instead, about the night of the accident. About the wheels and the crowd.

Halfway home, traffic thickened.

The cabbie twisted his chunky slab of face around and growled. "Shall I detour? Looks like a wreck up ahead."

"Yes, detour. I— No. No, on the other hand, cabbie—pull ahead. Let's—let's take a look."

The cabbie grunted. "Okay—it's your dough; if it's blood you want." The taxi weaved in and out among parked cars. Sirens were wailing, police cars drove up. "Los Angeles is one helluva town ta drive in," snorted the cabbie.

He honked his horn, angled out the

window, yelling, "Get that flea-trap outa the way, klunk—get goin'!" The cab swerved into a notch and idled. "Have ta hold it a sec," explained the cabbie. He turned, wiping his brow. "Funny, ain't it, how a crowd gathers when there's 'n accident?"

Spallner started. He saw his fingers tremble on his knee, and then he looked at the cabbie and he said, "Have you noticed that, too?"

The cabbie nodded profoundly. "Sure. You find that no matter what happens. A babe pulls a faint on the corner of Wilshire and LaBrea and in five minutes you got a mob big enough they need a convention permit." The cabbie snorted. "Bunch of morbid guys. What they call 'em?—sadists? Maybe they're curious, I dunno. Anyway, they come runnin' as if it was their own relative got beaned. Crazy."

Spallner sat very quietly, digesting all this. It was a fact. It could be corroborated at any accident. A fire, or a wreck or an explosion. People appeared as if by magic. It all seemed a bit fantastic.

Gingerly, Spallner advanced the subject a step further. "Ever seen an accident late at night?"

"Yeah. Don't make no difference, though. There's always a crowd—"

With that, the cabbie shifted gears and plowed out around a street car. The wreck came to view. Two cars interlocked smashingly, fenders severed and gashed, both of them snarled into the cow-catcher of the street-car. A body lay on the sidewalk. You knew there was a body there even if you couldn't see it. Because of the crowd.

The crowd with its back toward Spallner. With its back toward him. Spallner opened the window and almost started to yell. But he didn't have the nerve.

He didn't have the nerve.

He was afraid to see their *faces*. . . .

AT THE dinner table, alone, Spallner took another glass of port and pulled it down. His butler came in and cleared away the dishes. Pausing at the door, watching Spallner take his fourth glass, he cleared his throat warningly.

Spallner laughed. "It's all right, Mac. I'll stay sober."

"But, sir—so soon after the hospital."

"I *need* it."

"Yes, sir. Anything else?"

"Nnn-no—yes. Yes, there is, Mac. I've got a hunch. I want some newspapers, a lot of them. Buy every paper printed recently."

"How far back shall I go, sir?"

"Spread it out. Buy one paper every other week for the last two years. And buy *all* the papers for the last month." Spallner poured more wine. "I'm going to the office for a brief check-up. I'll drop you at the newspaper plant and pick you up later."

"May I ask what you want these papers for, sir?"

"What for?" Spallner put the wine to his lips and savored it. "I—I'm looking up some pictures of some old friends. Yes, that's it. Some old friends."

SPALLNER drove a new car downtown. He talked and laughed again with his partner, Morgan, up in his private office. This continued for half an hour. All the while they were talking, at the back of his brain a small watch ticked, a watch that never needed winding. It was the memory of a few little things.

"I seem to have a penchant for accidents these days," said Spallner. "I got out of the hospital this morning and the first thing on the way home, I detoured around one."

"Things run in cycles," said Morgan absent-mindedly.

They went on talking for half an hour more, until there was a hard, blunt metal

noise, a grinding and rending from the street. Overlooking the intersection from the fourth floor, both Spallner and Morgan had a good view of an accident in birth.

A truck and a cream-colored Cadillac.

"What'd I tell you?" exclaimed Morgan. "Cycles."

A great bond of ice closed in on Spallner as he stood there, looking at his watch, at the small second hand. One, two, three, four, five seconds—people running—eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve—from all over people came running—fifteen, sixteen, seventeen seconds and more people and more cars and more blowing of horns. Spallner shook uncontrollably. He couldn't stop shaking. He was afraid.

The crowd gathered so fast.

Spallner kept looking down. He saw a woman's body sprawled a few moments before the cordon of curious people ate it up. He was frozen and shaking and afraid. He kept swallowing hard.

Morgan noticed. "You'd better sit down, old man. You look lousy."

"I'm all right. I'm all right. Let me alone. I'm all right. Can—can you see those people down there? I wish we were closer. I wish—"

HE STRAINED his eyes to see. The faces were all a blur. He tried to concentrate on one or two of them, but the crowd was jostling and mixing, he couldn't draw a bead on any one face.

Once he thought he saw a red-haired woman. He couldn't be positive.

"Have you a pair of binoculars, Morgan?"

"What in hell for?"

"I want to take a look."

"Sorry. Not here. Now, look, this isn't good at all for you. You're pale, you're shaking—"

Spallner tautened himself with an effort and turned. "Will you come along, Morgan? And hurry."

"What's the rush? Where're you going?"

Spallner thrust the door aside, hurried out. Morgan paced after him to the elevator. They waited. Spallner impatiently. "If only I'm there in time."

"Time for what?"

"Don't mind me—I'm insane. Here we are. Come on."

Elevator doors sliced open, shut behind them, the floor sank, stratas of offices whipped past them. Street floor. Doors opened. Spallner strode out, his head bursting into a fiery ache, the scarred brow throbbing.

The street. Confusion. Spallner vaulted across the mental confusion of the intersection, his dark eyes probing, prodding, demanding.

MOMENTARILY, he glimpsed a face in the crowd. The face of a red-haired woman with too much powder on her face.

"There, Morgan, there! Did you see her?"

"Who?"

"Damn it; she's gone! The crowd closed in!"

He plunged through bodies, legs, elbows, startled faces, rough voices. The little red-haired woman had been about halfway through. Evidently she had seen him coming. She was gone.

Another recognizable face! A little boy with freckles who was crying. But there are many little boys in the world. They have freckles. And they cry. And anyway, it was no use; this little boy ran off just before Spallner reached him, slipped into nothing.

"Is she dead?" someone asked. "Is she dead?"

That voice. It sounded so very, very familiar. Where had he heard it before?

"She's dying," someone else replied. "She'll be dead before the ambulance ar-

rives. They shouldn't have moved her. They shouldn't have moved her."

All of the faces in the crowd seemed vaguely familiar. Spallner brushed through them, seeking, hoping; afraid and alert.

"Hey, Mister, stop your pushing!"

"Who you shoving, buddy?"

All different faces, though. He couldn't be sure of any of them.

The siren was whining as he elbowed back out to Morgan, who caught him as he staggered and almost dropped.

"God, Spallner, you look awful. Better get some rest, quick. Why in hell'd you come down?"

"I don't know. I really don't. They moved, Morgan, someone moved her. You should never move a traffic victim. It kills them. It kills them."

"Yeah. That's the way with people. The dumb saps."

"I HAVEN'T much to go on," said Spallner. "As far as ordinary logic goes, anyway." He arranged newspaper clippings carefully. Side by side he placed them. Finished, he motioned at them.

"Take a squint at these, Morgan. See what you think."

Morgan squinted, and then winced impatiently. "What's gotten into you?" he complained. "Ever since your accident you act as if every traffic scramble was part of your life. What's the idea of all these clippings of motor car crackups, all these photos?"

"It's not the cars, Morgan," Spallner said quietly. "It's the crowd that gathers after the accident. Look at it. Look at the faces. Compare one picture with another."

"This is silly."

"Here. This accident in the Wilshire District. Compare it to this one in Hollywood. No resemblance. But now, let's align it with another snapped in the Wilshire District ten years ago."

He pointed. "This woman. She's in both pictures. She's the same woman, wouldn't you say so?"

"Ye-ess. I'd say she was. But what has that to do with your phobia about accidents?"

"Simply this; these pictures were taken ten years apart. And the accidents occurred about three miles from each other."

"So what? This woman happened coincidentally to be there."

"Once, maybe. But eight times over a period of ten years, no. Look." He dealt out six more pictures, each dated about a year apart. "She's in *all* of them!"

"Maybe she's perverted."

"She's more than that. I don't know what. There are two other points. How does she *happen* to be there so quickly at each accident? And why does she wear the same clothes in pictures taken over a ten-year period?"

"That's right. She is, isn't she?"

"And, last of all, she was standing over *me* the night of the accident a week ago!"

SPALLNER made a file, putting pictures, and duplicates into the file. He marked crayon rings around familiar faces. This done, he had evidence that almost convinced the skeptic, Morgan.

"What," asked Morgan, "does this all add up to?"

"I don't know what it adds up to, except that there's a universal law about accidents. *Crowds gather*. They *always* gather. And people, just like you and I, have wondered from time to time, from time immemorial, why they gathered so quickly. *I* know the answer. Here it is!"

He flung the clippings down. "It frightens me. I don't know how to figure it!"

"These people—mightn't they be thrill-hunters, perverted sensationalists with a carnal lust for blood and morbidity?"

Spallner shrugged. He sifted the papers through and through. "Does that explain

their being at all the accidents? Notice that they stick to one territory. An accident in Hollywood will bring out one group of faces. An accident in Huntington Park another. But there's a norm for faces, a certain percentage appear at each accident."

Morgan gaped. "They're not *all* the same faces, are they?"

"Of course not. Accidents draw *normal* people, too, in the course of time. But *these,* I find, are always the *first* ones there!"

"Who are they? What do they want? You keep hinting and never telling. Good Lord, you must have some idea. You've scared yourself, and now you've got me jumping."

"I don't know. I've tried questioning them, tried even getting *to* them. Someone always gets in my way, or trips me. I'm always too late. They slip into the crowd and vanish. They get away. The crowd offers protection to some of its members. They see me coming!"

"Sounds like some sort of clique."

"It is. I don't know *what* you'd call them. They have one thing in common, I know. They always show up together. At a fire or an explosion or on the sidelines of a war, at any public demonstration of this thing called death. Vultures, hyenas or saints, I don't know which. I just don't know. But I'm going to the police about it. It's gone on long enough. One of them shifted that woman's body two days ago on Seventh Street. They shouldn't have moved her. They shouldn't have interfered. It killed her.

His eyes narrowed.

"Oh, I just happened to think of it . . ."

"What?"

"Maybe they *wanted* her dead."

Busy stuffing a brief-case full of his clippings, Spallner shivered. "I'm going down to the police station now. Come along?"

"I have an appointment with the wife."

"Oh, yes. I forgot. See you later, then."

"Give my regards to the cops. Think they'll believe you?"

"Oh, they'll believe me all right. Good night."

WILSHIRE BOULEVARD was dimmed out because of the war restrictions. Huge billboards and neon lights were darkened, street lights themselves had been enfeebled to a sickly illumination.

Spallner took it slow and easy driving downtown.

"I want to get there alive," he told himself.

Driving depends on two things. Your car and the others. Others cars do quick, fatal things. A huge freight truck just ahead of Spallner, suddenly threw on its air-brakes.

It stopped too suddenly.

Spallner shouted, jammed his brakes. Ramming, his new car crashed into the rear of the truck. The windshield hammered back into Spallner's face. His body was forced back and forth in several lightning jerks. Then all motion stopped, all noise stopped and only pain filled the night.

After a long silence, horns began to honk. Somebody screamed. Traffic jolted to shrieking standstills. The car had not turned over this time.

But there was a crowd.

Spallner struggled to climb out of the car. His heart bounded, his lungs caved in and out, wheezing horribly. The car door cracked open and he slipped, fell down onto his face and lay there bleeding.

"You're a lucky man, Mr. Spallner. If that gash had been an eighth of an inch deeper . . ."

"Never move a traffic victim. You might kill him. . . ."

His head was bleeding thick red blood.

And the crowd gathered out of nowhere.

He tried to move, and he realized something was *wrong* with his spine. He hadn't felt much. But it was hurt. He couldn't move. He didn't dare move.

He couldn't speak. He opened his mouth. Nothing came out but gagging.

Someone said, "Give me a hand. We'll roll him over and lift him into a comfortable position.

"No! No!" Spallner's brain burst apart in a scream. "Don't move me! You idiots, you'll kill me if you move me! You'll kill me. Don't!"

But he could not say any of this. He could only think it.

Hands touched him, grasped him. They started to lift him. He cried out and nausea overtook him. They straightened him out into a ramrod of horrible agony. Two men did it. One of them who was thin, bright, alert and pale, who stared at Spallner and kept wetting his lips as if he were hypnotized; and another man who was old and wrinkled like an apricot.

HE HAD seen their faces before.

A familiar voice said, "Is—is he dead?"

Another voice, a memorable voice replied, "No. Not yet. But he will be before the ambulance gets here."

"It's all a mad plot! Like every accident! cried Spallner hysterically at the solid wall of faces. They were all around him, the judges and jurors, the faces he had seen before.

The freckled boy.

The red-haired woman.

The girl with the arms that twitched at her sides all by themselves.

"I know what you're here for! You're here just like you're at all accidents! To make sure that the right ones live and the right ones die! That's why you lifted me. You knew it would kill me! You knew I'd live if you left me alone!

"And that's the way it's always been since time began, when crowds gather. You can get away with murder easier this way. You can cover up, saying you didn't know it was dangerous to move a hurt man!"

He gaped at them. "Who are you? Where do you come from and how do you get here so soon? You're the crowd that's always in the way, using up valuable air that a dying man's lungs need, using up the space he needs to lie in, alone, tramping on people to make sure they die, that's you! I know all of you!"

Faces. The high-school student with the pimpled face. The old man. The red-haired woman.

Someone picked up the brief-case. "Whose is this?" they asked.

"It's mine! It's evidence against you all."

Green eyes, inverted over him. Upside down, green eyes staring at him from under a slouch hat.

Faces.

Somewhere a siren wailed. The ambulance was coming.

But, looking at the faces, the construction and cast and form of the faces, Spallner knew it was too late.

He read it in their faces. They *knew*.

Spallner tried to speak. A few fragments got out.

"It—looks as if I'd join you now. I—I guess I'm a member of the band, now."

He smiled wanly. "Just—just remember—remember one thing—" He chuckled painfully. "At—at the next accident—whenever it is—tonight or tomorrow or next week. It's I who will be the *first one there!* You'll find me when you all arrive."

He closed his eyes then, and waited for the coroner.

SUPERSTITIONS

VARIOUS TRIBES OF MADAGASCAR BELIEVE THEMSELVES TO BE DESCENDED FROM *CROCODILES!* THESE SCALY REPTILES ARE VIEWED THEREFORE, TO ALL INTENTS AND PURPOSES, AS A MAN AND BROTHER. IF ONE SHOULD SO FAR FORGET HIMSELF AS TO DEVOUR ONE OF HIS HUMAN KINSFOLK, THE CHIEF OF THE TRIBE ASSEMBLES HIS PEOPLE AT THE EDGE OF THE WATER, AND SUMMONS THE FAMILY OF THE OFFENDING CULPRIT *TO DELIVER HIM UP TO THE ARM OF JUSTICE!*

A HOOK IS BAITED AND CAST INTO THE LAKE OR RIVER AND THE NEXT DAY THE GUILTY BROTHER OR ONE OF HIS FAMILY IS DRAGGED ASHORE. AFTER HIS CRIME HAS BEEN CLEARLY BROUGHT HOME TO HIM BY A STRICT COURT RITUAL, HE IS SENTENCED TO **DEATH** AND **EXECUTED.**

JUSTICE BEING THUS SATISFIED AND THE LAW FULLY VINDICATED, THE DECEASED CROCODILE IS *LAMENTED AND BURIED LIKE A KINSMAN.* A MOUND IS RAISED OVER HIS REMAINS AND ***A STONE MARKS THE PLACE OF HIS HEAD!***

AND TABOOS

by Hill

A ROMAN CURE FOR FEVER WAS TO PARE THE SUFFERER'S NAILS *AND STICK THE PARINGS WITH WAX ON A NEIGHBOR'S DOOR BEFORE SUNRISE!* THE FEVER WAS THEN BELIEVED *TO PASS FROM THE SICK MAN* ***TO HIS NEIGHBOR!***

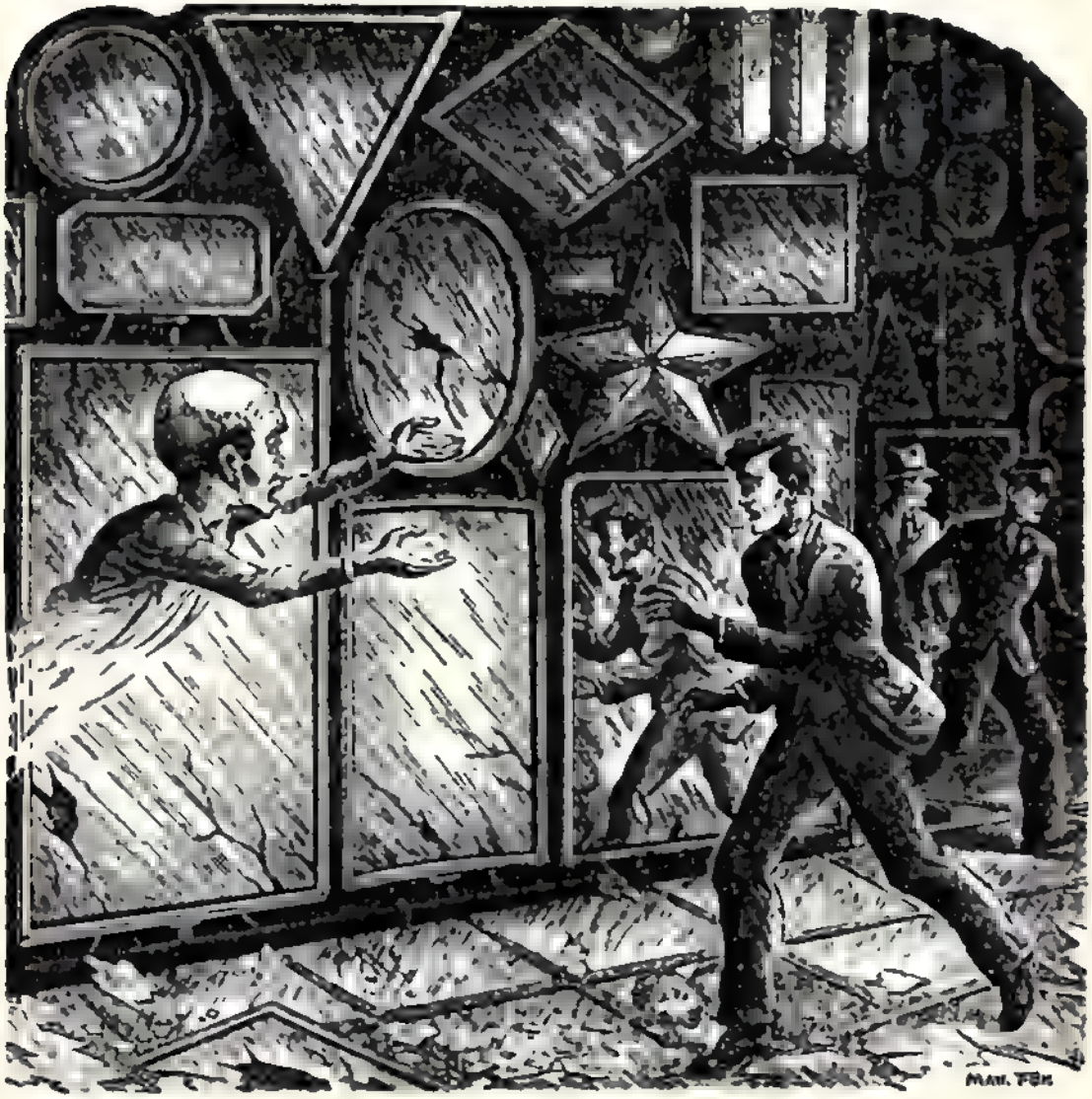
IN ARABIA WHEN A PLAGUE WAS RAGING, THE PEOPLE SOMETIMES LED A CAMEL THROUGH ALL THE QUARTERS OF THE TOWN BELIEVING THAT THE ANIMAL *WOULD TAKE THE PESTILENCE ON ITSELF!* THEY THEN TOOK IT TO A SACRED PLACE AND STRANGLED IT IN THE BELIEF *THAT THIS WOULD* ***RID THEM OF THE PLAGUE!***

The Glass Labyrinth

By STANTON A. COBLENTZ

ON A CERTAIN June evening that I consider one of the most memorable of my life, nothing was further from my mind than the thought of adventure. Lulled by the languorous warm air, I had been strolling in the early twilight by the banks of Westmore Creek, smoking my pipe in long

For eleven years he worked to find a dimensional short cut to time and space . . . only to find himself trapped by his own discovery.



contented puffs, in one of those moods halfway between dreamy lethargy and delighted enjoyment of my surroundings. It was accordingly with a shock that the leisurely current of my reveries was broken, and that, on rounding a clump of bushes by the water's brink, I heard myself accosted by an excited voice.

"Professor Brattle! By the stars, if it isn't Professor Brattle! Just the man I've been wanting to meet!"

The sound of one's own name pronounced unexpectedly when one's mind is far away, always comes with something of the sensation of a thunderclap. But in this case the impression was all the more startling because the speaker, in his eagerness, projected himself toward me as if out of a catapult—and because he was one of the oddest-looking individuals I had ever encountered.

Picture for yourself a little thin man, scarcely more than five feet in height, with a head of disproportionate size—a wrinkled bald head with huge oval brow and deep-set strained-looking eyes; a head which, apparently large enough for two, was tilted at an angle like the leaning tower of Pisa, while the pale flexible features worked with emotion, and the agitated words came forth:

"Professor Brattle! Professor Brattle! By God, it's providential that we met tonight! How are you, Professor? How are you?"

He shot out a lean hand, which I could not help taking; and the warmth and enthusiasm of his clasp surprised me.

But as I stared into those tiny penetrating eyes, I had only the vaguest recollection of ever having encountered their possessor before.

"Don't remember me, do you, Professor?" he rattled on, quick to note my embarrassed situation. "Well, we met three years ago, at the International Institute of Higher Physics. I was a brother delegate, and was struck by the able talk you gave, on introducing Herr Einstein—"

"Yes, yes, yes!" I interrupted. "Now I recall! Your name is—"

"Roderick Morrow. Doctor Roderick Morrow. A name, I dare say, that the world will know more of hereafter."

In reply, I could merely grunt. Of all the queer specimens I had ever run across, this man was the queerest!

"You don't believe me, Professor?" he spurted on. "Well, if I do say it myself, I've made discoveries that will place me beside Newton and Edison."

My astonishment was fast turning to pity; it now appeared that the man was not merely queer, he was a lunatic.

"Yes, beside Newton and Edison!" he reiterated; while I, looking gloomily about me, was wondering how to escape. "Come with me! Let me show you!"

HE TOOK my arm; and, though I did my best to resist, some compelling magnetism in his bright eyes, some strange contagion in his enthusiasm, drew me forward at his side.

"You must come with me! You must come!" he ejaculated, in a series of rapid sputterings. "Just this evening I perfected the masterpiece! Would you believe it? Just this very evening! It works! Works like a charm! Never in all the ages was anything like it seen! The Cosmo-spectograph, I call it."

"Cosmo what?"

"Cosmo-spectograph. Or just the 'Spec' for short. But wait! You'll see! I was just rushing out—just rushing out to find someone to show it to. And then—it was providential, Professor! I came upon you! Just the man to appreciate it!"

"But what's it all about?" I demanded, as my captor hastened me along at an ever-increasing speed. I noted what an eager fire flashed from his deep slits of eyes; I observed how heavily he panted, and how

his shoulders heaved in his agitation; and I could not help being just a little interested despite myself.

"Come, come, come!" he exclaimed, still accelerating our pace, although we were already moving at a gait altogether out of keeping with the mood of the peaceful June evening.

"For eleven years I have worked at it! Eleven years! Best years of my life!" he snapped, in his hurried staccato, while he rushed me across an automobile-laden road with such recklessness that I feared I should not survive to learn what he had worked at.

"Right around the corner! Right around the corner!" he hastened on. "There's my studio! I've admitted no one for years!"

Though relieved to know that our mad chase was nearly over, I had an impulse to turn back even at this point; for I was still convinced that my new-found acquaintance was a madman, though possibly a harmless one. Little did I suspect that the most amazing episode of my life lay just ahead.

Into a huge dilapidated-looking old house he led me, then down a flight of steps and through a dark doorway, where he paused, almost invisible in the gloom. "Now prepare yourself!" he counselled, mysteriously. "I do not wish to reveal the 'Spec' too suddenly, lest the shock should overwhelm you."

"Oh, I guess I'll be able to bear it!" I grumbled, not liking the idea of standing there in that dismal cellar, without so much as a spark of light to reassure me that I was not being led into a den of thieves.

"Well, then, shield your eyes! Steady yourself! Here goes!" he warned, in a deliberate and grandiose manner. But still nothing happened.

I was mumbling something under my breath, and beginning to retreat a step or two, when suddenly I heard the snapping of a switch, and the place was deluged with light.

Instinctively I blinked, and flung a hand protectively to my forehead; the illumination was so intense that for a moment I was dazzled, and could make out no object in particular. All that I knew was that the light was of a peculiar, penetrating blueness; hard, cold, and almost unearthly in its vivid brilliance. It was as if thousands of bulbs, with a concentration of heatless, inimical fire, were glaring upon me all at once.

"See! See! The Spec! The Cosmospectograph!" exclaimed Doctor Morrow, hopping up and down in throes of irrepressible excitement, like a child at some new game.

Fortunately, I have always been gifted with powerful eyesight; and it was, therefore, but a moment before I was able to adjust myself to the blaze of lights. And what I saw, as I gradually took in the spectacle before me, was enough to make anyone gasp in bewilderment.

MIRRORS, and mirrors, and mirrors! mirrors by the dozens, by the scores, by the hundreds! Throughout the entire basement, which was an exceptionally large one, they were spread in every nook and corner and with all queer arrangements. They covered the floors, so that one had but narrow trails to walk on, they glared from the ceiling; they mantled the walls; they were bent and twisted at every conceivable angle. There were plain mirrors and curved mirrors, large mirrors and small mirrors, convex mirrors and concave mirrors, mirrors tinted red, and mirrors with a yellowish coloring. There were tall mirrors placed opposite one another in crooked parallel lines, forming labyrinthine passageways; there were round mirrors, triangular mirrors, and star-shaped mirrors; there were rotating mirrors that moved rapidly amid a buzz of motors and

cast dagger-like flashes of light; there were prismatic mirrors that shed rainbow glints and sparkles in captivating profusion.

For a moment I was speechless. I merely stared in the manner of a man who, not believing in ghosts, has just seen an apparition. Was this but the contraption of some ingenious monomaniac?

"See! See! I told you you'd be surprised! I told you!" exclaimed Morrow, jubilantly, as he bustled back and forth, his huge head tilted at a sharper angle than ever above his undersized shoulders.

"It does look extraordinary—" I started to admit, fumbling for words.

"Extraordinary? Wait, Professor, you haven't seen anything yet! You haven't watched the Spec in action!"

"Well, what's it like in action?"

"If I were to tell you," he declared, as he ranged back and forth impatiently, "You wouldn't believe me. No, Professor, you couldn't believe me. You'd say I'm crazy, just as all the others have done!"

Not presuming to disagree, I waited for him to continue.

"Before I explain, let me demonstrate," he hurried on. "Seeing is believing, they say! Are you ready?"

I nodded in the affirmative.

Morrow darted over to a switchboard near the door, and pressed his hand to a lever. "Here, we'll begin mildly," he said. And he turned a dial to the number *1300*.

INSTANTLY the blue light was deepened, until its intensity became almost unbearable. There was a whirring as of motors in rapid rotation, and a clicking of levers; scores of the mirrors began to shift and revolve on hinges and axles; red and white electric sparks darted from the ceiling, and there was a crackling as of muffled thunder.

But what particularly caught my attention was the reflection just before me in one of the mirrors. The figure of a helmeted man on horseback darted into view, life-sized, and distinct enough to be recognized as a medieval knight! Behind him rode others, their lances gleaming and sparkling, their banners brilliantly waving. I saw the flashing of the iron corselet; I almost felt I could hear the clanking of the heavy mail. And in the background the grim, squat shape of a castle, with armed guards around it and a drawbridge and moat, made me feel as if I had been transported back to the Middle Ages!

"See! The year 1300!" cried the elated Morrow. "Real as life itself! Now what other period would you like to see?"

"Well, I—I—how about 1300 B. C.?" I exclaimed, reeling like one who has lost touch with all solid things.

"Very well!" acquiesced the inventor, turning the dial to *1300*. "Do you mind stepping down the aisle a little ways? Yes, there, down that corridor between the slanting mirrors."

I did as directed; and, in a moment, had a glimpse of desert sands, and tasselled Egyptians, and a long funeral procession, with slaves carrying palm branches, painted boxes, fruits and flowers; while to one side flowed a wide, reedy river that I recognized as the Nile. Still staggering a little, I realized that I had been borne back more than 3200 years through time!

After this, I was ready for nearly anything. I could scarcely have been more shaken had I been shown scenes on Mars —or on Sirius! Hence I could only stare, and gasp in astonishment, when given glimpse of Babylonia in the year 4000 B. C. —and when transported back to 20,000 B. C., to the day of the Neolithic caveman. I now saw no reason to doubt Morrow's statement that he could get recognizable impressions as far back as 100,000 B. C. "Beyond that," he declared, "we will need more power—which, of course, we'll develop in time."

Then, with an odd twinkle in his eyes, he switched the dial to 2500, and exclaimed, "Suppose now we go into the future!"

Before I was able to do more than mumble incredulously in reply, a reddish tinge overcame the light, and I was aware of curious-looking figures moving on some of the more remote mirrors.

"Over there! Step over that way!" requested the inventor, as, nearly tripping over one of the floor glasses in my excitement, I made haste to follow directions.

SO UTTERLY bewildered had I became that I stared like one in a dream; my memory has retained but scattered fragments of the forms that flickered across the mirror. I have a recollection, however, of a city with mountainous towers that would dwarf those of Manhattan; a city with a succession of elevated moving platforms instead of streets; a city above which multitudes of men glided on little flying devices with outstretched wings not much longer than their arms, which enabled them to dart back and forth, to zigzag and spiral with tremendous speed, or else to remain poised almost motionless, like an insect hovering above a flower.

"So? How do you like the year 2500?" inquired Morrow, with a smile that seemed to say, "Well, sir, are you ready to congratulate me *now?*"

"Suppose next we take a view of 3000—or 4000," he went on. But no longer able to bear the succession of shocks, I slumped down in exhaustion against one of the mirrors, and interrupted my host with an impatient gesture.

"No, no, wait a while. I've seen enough for one evening—enough for any man. First tell me, Doctor, tell me—how'd you accomplish it? Why, I'll swear it's the most miraculous achievement of the age!"

"I know that," he admitted, still embarrassed by no false modesty. "But the principle is very complicated. You really wish me to explain?"

"Of course!"

"To make everything clear would require many hours. One cannot cover the whole of eleven years' research in a minute. But, stated in its simplest terms, the principle is one of higher mathematics. It's what I may call the conservation of time and space."

"Conservation of time and space?"

"Exactly!" His eyes gleamed brilliantly, and his great head tossed energetically back and forth. "You see, it's all a matter of dimensions. The fourth dimension includes not only space but time. The fifth includes these two, in addition to a third imponderable, which can be expressed only by mathematical symbols, but which includes the totality of all things, unchanging and everlasting. It is in the fifth dimension that I have worked, Professor. There everything that has ever happened or ever will happen exists—exists continually, and sends out its vibrations through the lesser dimensions."

"Vibrations?" I demanded, my head reeling with the difficulties of the explanation. "What kind of vibrations?"

DOCTOR MORROW rubbed his bald pate thoughtfully, and wrinkled his brow till it assumed the appearance of a long-overripe apple.

"Vibrations of a new type, hitherto undiscovered. Exceedingly faint pulsations in the ether, to which I have given the name of the Z-ray. I discovered them quite by chance one day, when experimenting with a new kind of electric lamp, made with a manganese filament and a potassium vapor. This is the lamp which, with modifications, you see about you now."

He pointed above him eagerly, to the scores of bulbs which steeped the place in its uncanny blue radiance.

"By means of the lamps, attached to an

ordinary television receiving set, I have been able to catch the Z-rays. How or why I do not know, any more than the discoverers of the Hertzian rays knew why they were able to utilize these vibrations in the radio. But the fact was that I could use the Z-rays. For many years my problem was to make them practically available, and with that thought in mind I devised a series of mirrors, in which they could be reflected, magnified, and held. This alone has occupied me for seven and a half years. You can imagine my elation, Professor, when finally I ironed out the last difficulty."

As if to give proof of this elation, the professor went hopping about the room ecstatically, until I feared that he would run full tilt into one of the mirrors, and so put a sorry end to his experiment.

"I'm afraid I don't thoroughly understand," I admitted, after he had ceased his mad peregrinations. "You mean to say these vibrations—these Z-rays—are pulsating about us at all times, in the manner of radio waves, or cosmic rays?"

"Well, not exactly!" The inventor rubbed his lean chin with a bony hand, and wrinkled his face into a thoughtful expression. "You see, the third dimension and the fourth and fifth are continuous and inter-penetrating, and in order to feel vibrations from either of the latter two one must project one's self into them."

"You mean, we have just now been in the fourth and fifth dimensions?"

"Naturally! Otherwise, how be reached by fourth and fifth dimension impressions?"

Morrow hopped several yards along the wall, and pointed to a little green switch half hidden between two mirrors. "See that? That's the Dimension Adjustor: to hold the doorway open, as it were, between the dimensions."

"And what's that other lever?" I inquired, indicating a small blue switch just beneath the green one.

"Oh, that—that's just the Emergency Brake. I put it there as a precaution—if anything goes wrong with any part of the machinery, one has only to pull that to shut off the power. As a matter of fact, I don't suppose we'll ever need it."

"Don't suppose so," said I, accepting this remark on its face value. Unfortunately, it did not occur to me to look carefully at the Emergency Brake, and note its exact appearance and position. But how bitterly I was to rue this oversight one short hour later!

WITH my head still reeling, I was preparing to leave for the evening, when Morrow seized my arm with an importunity beyond my power to resist.

"No, Professor, just a few minutes more! I've one final surprise for you! How would you like to witness a continuous panorama, from Julius Caesar to the day of our grandchildren's grandsons? Wait! I'll have it prepared in just a minute!"

Heedless of my protests, he seized a small kit of tools and went gliding away along one of the labyrinths, between two curving lines of six-foot mirrors. In an instant he had been lost to sight, but I could hear his heavy breathing, and the sounds of scraping, tapping and hammering as he labored somewhere not far off.

Five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen minutes went by. I began to grow impatient. "Aren't you ready Doctor?" I called. "My head's aching; I can't wait much longer."

"Just a second! Another second!" rasped his excited tones. "God damn this electro-primoscope! I can't get it adjusted!" And then the sound of scraping, tapping and hammering was heard again, though at an accelerated tempo.

"Make it quick, or you won't find me here!" I challenged.

If only I had shown more patience! For I am sure that it was my words that urged Morrow to a burst of excessive speed—

and that were responsible for some careless misstroke, and the ensuing disaster.

Suddenly, from above the mirrors where the inventor was hidden from view, there shot a succession of vivid white sparks—so bright that I was momentarily blinded. Simultaneously, a spurt of smoke shot upward, and a peculiar acrid odor came to my nostrils. And, at the same time, my ears were assaulted by an unearthly howl.

It was half a yell of anguish, and half an articulate cry, shrill, piercing, and desperate.

"Quick! Quick, Professor! Quick! The Emergency Brake! Emergency—"

Though my eyes were so dazzled by the lights that I could hardly tell one object from another, I leaped toward the indicated point.

"Quick, Professor! Quick! before it's too late!" screamed the voice, while the white sparks still spurted forth, and the odor of smoke grew sharper in my nostrils.

Amid the glare and horror of that moment, I caught sight of a small rod sticking out between the mirrors. "Quick, Professor—QUICK!" wailed the imploring voice.

And frantic not to lose a second, I flung out my hand, and snatched at the rod.

EVEN to this day, I am not quite clear as to the appalling sequel. It was as if I had touched off a charge of dynamite. There came a deafening, thudding roar, accompanied by a blaze of crimson light; the floor beneath me shook; the walls groaned as if from an earthquake; I heard the crash of shattering glass. And my legs gave way, and I sank down, stunned and nearly senseless. . . .

It may have been many minutes before I had recovered and rose uncertainly to my feet. The smoke had cleared away; an unearthly blue glare suffused the place, which was strewn with the fragments of a score of great mirrors. But where was the inventor?

"Doctor!" I called. "Doctor Morrow! Where are you?"

My voice rang strangely, as if in a tomb; and there was no response.

"Doctor! Where are you?" I repeated, fearing that he had been gravely injured, or even killed. "Where are you? Where are you?"

Still receiving no reply, I hastened down the passageway. His tool kit was plainly visible, the hammer and pliers scattered on the floor as if hastily abandoned. But the inventor was not to be seen.

With confused and throbbing head, I hastened back to the spot where Morrow had bade me wait for him, and sank down in sheer exhaustion. At the same time, by some uncanny attraction, my eyes were drawn to a little blue switch on the wall—the Emergency Brake. Leaping up, I observed it in horror—it was pressed flat against the plaster, in exactly the position in which I had first seen it!

But just above it was a green switch—the Dimension Adjustor—which stuck out as if wrenched violently out of place.

Groaning, I sank to the floor. All too well I knew what I had done! Maddened by haste, I had pulled the wrong switch!

IN THAT first moment of dread realization, my only thought was for the inventor. Having tried to throw back the Dimension Adjustor, and found that it would not respond, I had no impulse except to dash off again down the galleries of mirrors after the lost man.

With no more premeditation than that of a terrier scurrying away after a rat, I found myself among the mirrors once more.

"Doctor! Doctor!" I repeated my call of a minute before. "Where are you? Where are you?"

The echoes came back to me with a

mocking note, but there was no other response.

"Morrow! Doctor Morrow!" I cried once more. "Here I am! Tell me where, where to find you!"

Again silence, except for those same insulting echoes.

After still another fruitless try, I could stand it no longer. A fierce, unreasoning terror took possession of me; my only impulse was to rush away, to rush away as from a place of plague, to dash out of the house and cry for help.

After some difficulty, I groped my way to the door and up the basement stairs to the street. So wild and disheveled was my appearance that I do not wonder that passers-by thought me out of my head. Gradually a crowd gathered; but it was long before, with much difficulty, I managed to persuade my hearers that I was quite sane; that a man in mortal peril required immediate help. Possibly half an hour had passed before, accompanied by several policemen and a multitude of hangers-on, I descended again to the basement.

Even as I did so, I felt fresh misgivings. Would it not have been wiser to search for Morrow myself than to bring this crazed mob in at my heels? So stormily did they push their way downstairs that the combined effect was like that of an earthquake; the whole building trembled—the shock was more than the delicately adjusted mirrors would stand. For an instant—a time so sudden and fleeting that to this day I cannot be sure if what I saw was illusion or fact—I was aware of an image from the direction of the mirrors. There was a huge oval head, a pair of deep-set strained-looking eyes—and two lean sticks of arms reached out imploringly.

But almost before I could draw a breath, all was changed. Shaken by the rush of invading feet, the remaining mirrors collapsed, and fell in a shower of fargments, mingling their scraps with those of the previous disaster.

Long and eagerly we searched. But still there was no sign of Morrow. That odd-looking, earnest form was nowhere among the ruins.

Nor did further searching, nor inquiries by the police, bring any results. It is the view of the authorities that he was either spirited away, or fled while I was calling for help; but it is my own opinion that he is still alive, though beyond our reach; that he is trapped in the fourth dimension or the fifth, experiencing who knows what remarkable adventures in the time of the cave-dweller or in that of the unborn Superman!

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FILL IN AND MAIL—TODAY!

The Authors

TWO of the authors whose stories are featured in this May WEIRD TALES have sent in some interesting sidelights on their stories and themselves.

P. Schuyler Miller and Frank Owen are the writers. If you haven't already read *John Cawder's Wife* and *The Man Who Amazed Fish* in this issue, we think you've got a treat, two treats, in store for you.

Mr. Miller says he is a reader of WEIRD TALES from quite sometime back. He explains his interesting way of working up the story idea. But really now, Mr. Miller, is it as easy as you make it sound below?

It comes as a distinct shock to me to realize that I very probably rank now as an old reader of WEIRD TALES. As a farm boy I had been brought up on a diet of Jules Verne and H. Rider Haggard, but it was not until we moved to the city to permit me to enter high school that I saw my first copy of WEIRD TALES in a newsstand window. I remember vividly the huge spider on the cover, and watched that window faithfully for what must have been more than a year before I got up courage to buy my first copy. I've never stopped and never will, if I can help it.

That first issue had in it Edmond Hamilton's first story, "Monster God of Mamurth" and a serial by Greye La Spina, and not long after, if my memory is still good, came Merritt's "Woman of the Wood." I only wish that I could go to my bookshelf and check on that memory, but an early tragedy in my

young life came when the mother of a friend, to whom I had lent my collection of two years of the magazine, threw the whole stack out in a frenzy of housecleaning. I've never been able to replace them. In a fit of insanity I clipped my next two years, taking out my favorite yarns—and have kicked myself at the proper intervals ever since.

My first attempt at fiction was inspired by a story in WEIRD TALES—probably another of Hamilton's—and even I knew that it was terrible. A fan magazine printed it later as a horrible example of what goes on before a writer gels. Not until much later did I write anything that was fit to send to an editor. Meanwhile, the Miller career has not been particularly exciting. Because arts degrees were a dime a dozen prior to 1929, I majored in chemistry at Union College, got an M.S. in 1932, and found that in those times I had to have a Ph.D. to be worth hiring. The fooling around I had done with writing came to the rescue, and by devious paths I am now in a job in which I am writing news stories, taking photographs, editing reports, sitting on committees, and writing radio scripts for the Schenectady Department of Education—and enjoying it greatly, for all it leaves precious little time to write, except in school vacations.

When I can, I like to get outdoors and soak up the wilderness. It's more than two years since I've been able to go on a camping trip in the Adirondacks, but I tried to get a little bit of the mountains into *John Cawder's Wife*. I have aspirations as an amateur archeologist—a small toad in a comfortable puddle—and probably would be content to spend my days scratching around with a trowel and brazenly advancing theories on the typewriter. I hope that I can put some of the fascination of this study into words for WEIRD TALES some day without completely outraging my scientific friends.

But this is the story of *John Cawder's Wife* as well as of its author. Like many of my attempts, the story started with a title that floated up out of nowhere one night and was written down for safe-keeping. Ideas began to associate themselves with it: a woman who would be the wife not only of one John

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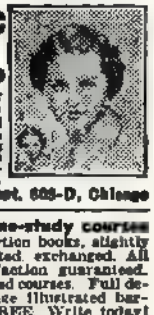

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Cawder but of all Cawders—an immortal, handed down from father to son for generations, held captive to keep her from working her evil on the world. It would have been easy to make such a woman a routine vampire, but it seemed to me that there would have to be a stronger motive than such a creature could arouse—that the Cawders could not let her go. And I began to wonder why.

It is strange how history plays into one's hands in these things. There have been mysterious dark women in the lives of many great geniuses—probably of more than I know about. Such a woman as Cawder's wife could live down through the generations, whipping the spark of genius to flame and basking in that flame. Perhaps it was her breed which gave the Greeks their myths of the Muses. She may have been the princess who found Moses, or the guiding spirit behind Akhnaton's ill-fated experiment with monotheism. Her kind would inspire the unhappy genius of a Poe or a Nijinsky. Cawder's wife is dead, but she may have had sisters who still play their dark role in the evolution of man's civilization.

I've never met a ghost nor had a personal experience with the supernatural, though I have friends who have. Last night I heard a number of ghost stories of old Schenectady, some of them elaborately fanciful, others simple enough to be convincing: the St. Bernard dog whose dead tail still thumps the floor to welcome his mistress' friends to her former home; the footsteps that pace the floor in a house which I can see from my office window, marking 22 paces where there is room for only 18; Aunt Harriet near Herkimer, who sees to it that her house is kept just as she left it many years ago. Maybe some day the skeptical chemist and archeologist will meet one of these "others" and really know.

P. Schuyler Miller

Chinese Authority

FRANK OWEN, aside from being a mighty good writer, is also an authority on Chinese character and lore. We've received more than a few letters from you

readers asking just how and where Mr. Owen digs up so much on the "Celestial scene."

Here is that author's answer:

The manner in which I began to write Chinese stories had nothing whatever to do with China. I wanted to write a story in yellow with no other color mentioned therein. I called it *The Yellow Pool.* It took place in the Canal Zone during the time they were building the Panama Canal. I wanted a yellow girl to be the heroine. The story was published in "Brief Stories." The magazine received a number of letters praising it. A few of the letters were published. Later WEIRD TALES used it as a reprint. Still later it was reprinted again in "Tales of Magic and Mystery."

My next Chinese story was *The Wind That Tramps the World,* published in WEIRD TALES in 1924 and reprinted in 1929. In 1929 it was used as the title of a collection of Chinese stories published in book form. After that I began studying the lore of China in all its amazing aspects. So far I have only scratched the surface, but nevertheless I have read many hundreds of volumes. I like to use real Chinese material in writing my stories. The descriptions of the drug-shop, the drugs, and the philosophy of Doctor Shen Fu are accurate. So, too, is much of the incidental material in *Quest of a Noble Tiger.* There is an obscure legend that Red Haired People lived in a mountain. The remarks on amber were the result of research. I had the idea for writing a story of this sort for about three years before I began it. Then suddenly I decided to write it and finished it quickly.

The main reason that I write Chinese stories is that the Chinese is the oldest existing civilization in the world. They gave us an idea for almost everything we treasure today. More than fifteen hundred years ago they were trying to make flying machines; three hundred years before Galileo invented the telescope, telescopes were in use in China; the Chinese performed the first plastic surgery operation a thousand years before it was used in this country; they invented paper, ink, block printing and manufactured the first printed book

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somewhere around 868 A. D. The medicine ephedrine which has taken the United States by storm was used by the Chinese for four thousand years. The Emperor Ming Huang of the T'ang Dynasty (684-762 A. D.) had one of his palaces air conditioned. He allowed the utmost religious freedom. Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Taoists and other religious sects all lived in his empire in perfect harmony. China has always been noted for religious freedom. For instance, the Jews have been in China since two hundred years before Christ and they have never been persecuted.

The Chinese love poetry, flowers, landscapes. They are good to their children. They cherish their girl babies, calling them "My Thousand Pieces of Gold." There is no infanticide in China though the claim has often been made. It used to be smart to discredit "the heathen Chinese" who only gave us the Golden Rule, and who proclaimed "Within the Four Seas All Men Are Brothers." We are fortunate to have these great people as our allies. They cannot lose because they do not know what it is to be conquered. As W. J. R. Thorbecke, former Netherlands Minister to China wrote in 1938, "Whatever the future may bring, China will outlive every danger, endure all suffering and, smiling patiently, emerge from all troubles to face life, to cultivate her soil, to beget children and to hold her place in the sun."

Frank Owen

READERS' VOTE

John Cawder's Wife	Specter in the Steel
A Wig for Miss Devore	Time and Again
The Man Who Amazed Fish	The Miracle
Lost Vacation	The Crowd
Colleagues	The Glass Labyrinth
	Lover of Caladiums

Here's a list of ten stories in this issue. Won't you let us know which three you consider the best. Just place the numbers: 1, 2, and 3 respectively against your three favorite tales—then clip it out and mail it in to us.

WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza New York City

WRITE TO MARTIN WARE, SECRETARY

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Mr. Grossette Again

I was very interested to read the replies to my letter in the Weird Tales Club department last issue. In the three letters I saw it looks as though I was overruled, two-to-one.

MacDowell and Scofield didn't think much of my skeptical outlook on weird occurrences and the supernatural. But Mr. Mulligan apparently agreed with me.

Maybe we can all agree pretty much on one thing, though. Reading about fantasy and weird things is great entertainment, and none the less so for those of us who have never actually run up against a ghost or vampire.

And anyway, if there are such things as ghosts, I guess I'd rather meet them in the pages of WEIRD TALES than face-to-face.

Adam Grossette.

NEW MEMBERS

Emily C. Wisniewski, 3036 S. 9th Pl., Milwaukee, Wisc.
Gaylord Herriott, 426 Wilson St., Sharon, Pa.
John Lawton, 4 Mill Rd., Irvington, N. J.
Kenn Franks, R. No. 4, Independence, Iowa
Isidore Wrubel, 423 Hinsdale St., Brooklyn, N. Y.
James B. Grimes, 6647 Langley Ave., Chicago, Ill.
Hugh Arundel Hinchliffe, III, Apt. 21, City Point Apts., Hopewell, Va.
Ted Gentry, Jr., 315½ S. E. 2nd St., Evansville, Ind.
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We're sorry that lack of space prevents the inclusion of the names of all New Members. The rest will appear next time.

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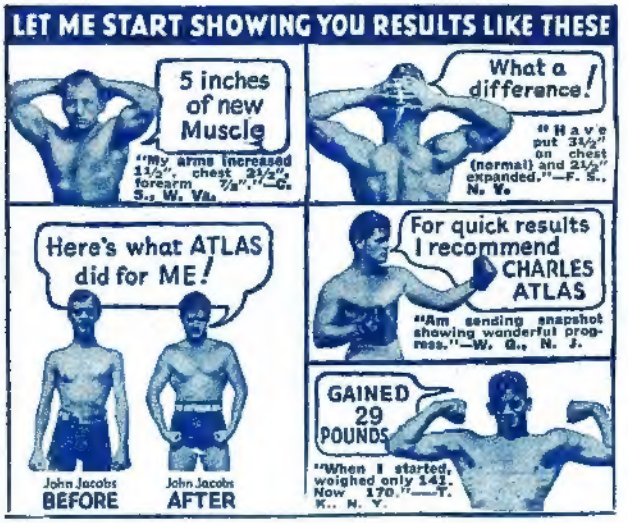

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